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WHAT CAN LITERATURE DO FOR ME?

What Can Literature Do For Me?

BY

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TO MY MOTHER

IN WHOSE LETTERS HER CHILDREN FIND THE UNCONSCIOUS REFLECTION OF LITERATURE THAT IS LIFE AND LIFE THAT IS LITERATURE

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED

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WHAT CAN LITERATURE DO FOR ME?

CHAPTER I

It Can Give You an Outlet

"I CAN remember," says Abraham Lincoln, "going to my little bedroom after hearing the neighbours talk of an evening with my father, and spending no small part of the night walking up and down and trying to make out what was the exact meaning of their, to me, dark sayings. I could not sleep, though I often tried to, when I got on such a hunt after an idea, until I had caught it; and when I thought I had got it, I was not satisfied until I had repeated it over and over, until I had put it into language plain enough, as I thought, for any boy I knew to comprehend."

Of all the incidents in Lincoln's life this has always seemed to me the most remarkable. That a boy of his years should have felt so keenly the burden of the inexpressible and should have spent sleepless hours in attempting to free himself from this burden seems at first glance to remove Lin-

coln from the class of normal men. We think of him as peculiar, as apart from other boys, as not so representative as he would have been if he had gone straight to bed and not bothered himself about putting into definite words the thoughts that were busy in his brain.

But, explain it as we may, the desire for self-expression in clear words is universal. Lincoln had it to a greater degree than most boys or most men. But all have it. We are often not conscious of it, but as soon as we read or hear our own thoughts better expressed than we could express them, we realize at once that they *are* our own thoughts and that we are the better and stronger for their adequate expression.

It was this passion for self-expression that made Lincoln one of the great spokesmen of his age. It enabled him to say in many letters and speeches what others were beginning to feel but could not express. It made him one of the great masters of English prose. He became a leader of men because he interpreted them to themselves. He gave back as rain what he received as mist.

Take his Gettysburg speech: "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty,

and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

"Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

"But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us, that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall

have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Why is this literature and why is Edward Everett's two-hour speech on the same occasion not literature? Let us picture the scene: There were men, women, and children in that audience who had lost brothers, sons, husbands, and fathers on the very ground on which they now stood. It was to them a holy place. It did not suggest to their minds vexed political questions; it suggested memories that were almost too sacred for words. What these people needed was a spokesman who should put into fitting words the dumb emotions that filled every heart, and this is what Lincoln did. He put their emotions into language "plain enough for any boy I knew to comprehend." But he did more. He expressed what all of us feel when we stand on a spot hallowed by heroic self-sacrifice. It may be a battlefield of victory or an equally glorious battlefield of defeat; it may be the birthplace or the grave or the home of a great man. The important thing for us is to feel anew the ennobling, the dedicating influence of the place itself. The man who can put this universal feeling into universal words not only

creates universal literature, but becomes a universal benefactor.

This is just what Edward Everett did not do. He did not speak for the audience, but to them. He entered into a long argument as to the relation of the federal government to the state governments. "Your argument," wrote Lincoln, "was new to me, and, as I think, is one of the best arguments for the national supremacy." Everett replied: "I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes."

Now what Lincoln did for the Gettysburg audience, the great poets and prose writers, the masters of literature, have done for mankind at large. A poet is a man who feels as we feel but has the gift of expression. Literature includes all writings that express for us what we consciously or unconsciously feel the need of saying but cannot. It includes the prose and verse that find us at most points, that take our half-formed thoughts, our suppressed moods, our stifled desires, and lead them out into harmony and completeness.

It is different with arithmetic or geometry.

The multiplication table, for example, is as valuable a piece of information as was ever compressed into so small a space. But compare it with these lines;

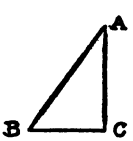
> So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
> So near is God to man,
> When Duty whispers low, Thou must,
> The youth replies, I can!

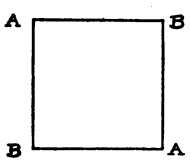
All of us have felt that when we have to do a thing we seem to be given a new power with which to do it. Young people especially, as Emerson implies in his last line, have had this experience. Perhaps one reason is that when we know we must perform a certain duty we stop wasting thought on how to escape it and so concentrate all our powers on actually doing it. Perhaps also we had never consciously thought of the reason for this principle of human nature but had nevertheless been vaguely conscious that the principle was true. At any rate when we read Emerson's lines we feel that he confirms and expands and elevates a mere impression into a definite thought, gloriously expressed. He has turned the light on our own nature and we know ourselves better. We begin to realize that whenever "I can" follows "You

must," it is an evidence not of weakness but of the native nobility of human nature.

Now the multiplication table is just as true as anything ever said by a poet. Perhaps it is truer, but it is true in a different way. We do not feel like saying: "Why, this table merely expresses what I had already felt or been dimly coming to, but expresses it with a beauty and force and completeness that give me a new sense of its truth." No one ever said that of the multiplication table and no one ever will. Emerson's lines, in other words, meet you halfway; the multiplication table does not. Emerson's lines are an outlet through which your own thought and feeling flow, and deepen as they flow; the multiplication table has to be put into you from the outside.

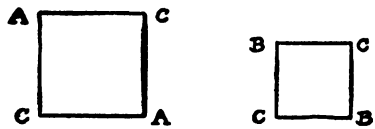
Let us take one other illustration: Here is what is called a right-angled triangle·





If you take the longest side of the triangle and construct a square based upon it, you will find that the square will be exactly equal to the sum of

the two squares you could construct on the basis of the two shorter sides of the triangle. Thus:



However large or small your right-angled triangle may be, this law holds good. Why? Nobody knows. You can prove the truth of the law as often as you please by experiment. But intuition would never have hinted it to you; common sense would never have suggested it; a lifetime of experience would never have arrived at it. When the student of geometry comes to this great theorem he will not be heard to say: "That's a truth that I have felt a hundred times, but never saw expressed so vividly before."

Pit the truth of the triangle now against the truth of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*. This great poem may seem at a first reading to be a jumble of impossible facts set to haunting music. But it is nothing of the sort. It is the story of a man who, by an act of cruelty done to a harmless bird, came to feel himself an outcast. He had cut all the cords of sympathy that bound him to the living things about him — to man and bird and

beast. He was so miserable that it was a small matter to him whether he lived or died. At last his sympathy with living things came back to him because, almost without knowing it, he found himself rejoicing in the joy of the water-snakes that played around the ship. Everything is restored now as it was, and the law of love is so burned into his soul that, as long as he lives, he must buttonhole others and tell them his experience.

All the so-called facts in the poem, all the events, bear directly on this experience. Did you never have an experience like it? Whether you are old or young, did you never kill or strike or hurt an innocent thing and feel mean and lonely for it? If so, you have lived *The Ancient Mariner* without knowing it. The poem is a part of yourself. Coleridge might have written from your experience as well as from an imaginary mariner's. But you have never knowingly or unknowingly proved by your own experience that the square of the longest side of a right-angled triangle is equal to the squares of the other two sides.

Do not approach literature, then, from the fact-side, but from the heart-side. Strike first for what it has in common with yourself. See in it an

outlet, not an inlet. Unfortunately it is still taught — you may be sure not learned — from the fact-side. I have before me three editions of *The Ancient Mariner*. They all have long introductions telling the facts about Coleridge's life, when and where the poem was written, when and where it was added to, what kind of line and stanza the poet used, what book or books he probably read before writing the poem, but not a word as to what the poem has in it for you and me or of you and me. Now the life of a poet, the date of his work, the kind of metre employed, all have something to do with a poem. But they are secondary, not primary. The first thing to do is to find yourself in the poem itself. When you do this, when the poem means something to you, when you see in it a reflection or extension of yourself, when it becomes a real outlet for you, you will want to know something about the writer. Seek first, however, yourself in the poem, and all these other things will be added unto you. You can no more learn literature from the history of literature than you can learn arithmetic from the history of arithmetic.

If you could summon before you the makers of literature they would tell you that they found

their inspiration not in introductions to great books, not in discussions of great books, not in learned notes about great books, but in great books themselves. They found themselves in these books, for these books were a voice from within, not a fact from without. Listen to some of the men who have put their experience on record:

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, and Thomas Carlyle's *French Revolution* are very different sorts of books. But they have one thing in common: they grip human life with the open hand. Here is what these books meant to a famous Scotch writer in his boyhood and young manhood: "I have cause," said Robert Chambers, who was an intimate friend of Walter Scott, "to revere the name of Defoe, who reached his hand down through a century and a half to wipe away bitter tears from my childish eyes. The going back to school was always a dreadful woe to me, casting its black shadow far into the latter part of my brief holidays. I have had my share of suffering and sorrow since, like other men, but I have seldom felt so absolutely wretched, as when, a little boy, I was about to exchange my present homelife for the hardships and uncon-

genialities of school. . . . And yet, I protest, I had but to take up *Robinson Crusoe*, and in a very few minutes I was out of all thought of the approaching calamity. . . . I had travelled over a thousand leagues of sea; I was in my snug, well-fortified cave, with the ladder upon the right side of it, 'so that neither man nor beast could get at me,' with my half-a-dozen muskets loaded, and my powder distributed into separate parcels, so that not even a thunderbolt should do me any irreparable injury. Or, if not quite so secure, I was visiting my summer plantation among my goats and corn, or shooting, in the still, astonished woods, birds of marvellous beauty; or lying upon my stomach upon the top of the hill, watching through my spyglass the savages putting to sea, and not displeased to find myself once more alone in my own little island.

"During that agonizing period which intervened between my proposal of marriage by letter to Jemima Anne, and my reception of her reply, how should I have ever kept myself alive, save for the chivalrous aid of the Black Knight in *Ivanhoe?* To him, mainly, assisted by Rebecca, and (I am bound to say) by that scoundrel Brian de Bois Guilbert, are my obligations due, that I

did not — through the extremities of despair and hope suffered during that interval — become a drivelling idiot.

"When her answer did arrive — in the negative — what was it which preserved me from the noose, the razor, or the stream, but Mr. Carlyle's *French Revolution?* In the woes of poor Louis Capet I forgot my own. . . . Who, having a grateful heart, can forget these things, or deny the blessedness of books?"

Plato is usually thought to be very dry reading. There is an impression that he wrote only for specialists in Greek or philosophy. The truth is that he wrote for everybody, young and old, learned and unlearned. Try his *Phædrus*, or *Symposium*, or *Phædo*, or *Crito*, especially the last, in Jowett's translation. Four more fascinating dialogues were never written or imagined. To find yourself in these or in any one of them will be the beginning of a lifelong education in wonderful thinking and wonderful expression. Here is what J. A. Symonds, who became a great interpreter of Greek thought, says of the influence of Plato upon him when he was a schoolboy at Harrow: "My hostess, a Mrs. Bain, who lived in Regent's Park, treated me to a comedy at the

Haymarket. I forget what the play was. When we returned from the play I went to bed and began to read my Cary's Plato. It so happened that I stumbled on the *Phædrus*. I read on and on, till I reached the end. Then I began the *Symposium;* and the sun was shining on the shrubs outside the ground floor on which I slept before I shut the book up. I have related these unimportant details because that night was one of the most important nights of my life. . . . Here in the *Phædrus* and the *Symposium* I discovered the revelation I had been waiting for, the consecration of a long-cherished idealism. It was just as though the voice of my own soul spoke to me through Plato. Harrow vanished into unreality. I had touched solid ground. Here was the poetry, the philosophy of my own enthusiasm expressed with all the magic of unrivalled style."

Edmund Burke was probably the greatest orator that ever lived. Certainly no orator of the English-speaking race was his equal. How much he owed to inborn talent and how much to training can never be told. But his own opinion was that the study of Cicero first waked his dormant powers to activity. I was only a boy, said Burke, but

the great Roman became at once "the model on which I laboured to form my own character in eloquence, in policy, in ethics, and in philosophy." Nathaniel Hawthorne, the author of the greatest American novel, used to say that his awakening came from the reading in early boyhood of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. "Unquestionably," says Walter Besant, the popular English novelist, "the book which most seized my imagination was the immortal *Pilgrim's Progress*. It still seems to me the book which has influenced the minds of Englishmen more than any other outside the covers of the Bible."

"Shakespeare," says Robert Louis Stevenson, the author of *Kidnapped*, "has served me best. Few living friends have had upon me an influence so strong for good as Hamlet or Rosalind. The next book, in order of time, to influence me, was the New Testament, and in particular the Gospel According to St. Matthew. I believe it would startle and move any one if they could make a certain effort of imagination and read it freshly like a book, not droningly and dully like a portion of the Bible."

[redacted]tice that Stevenson does not refer

to a particular passage or verse or chapter from the Bible; he refers to a whole book. He evidently read the Bible not by fragments, but by books. No masterpiece of world-literature has suffered so much by piecemeal reading as the Bible. On Sundays it is read aloud by select chapters or parts of chapters, and expounded by select verses; in Sunday-schools it is taught with an equal disregard of book divisions; and even in home study and private reading the same hop-skip-and-jump method is generally followed. Suppose we should read Shakespeare the same way — one day a few passages from *Romeo and Juliet*, the next day an act from *Hamlet*, the third day a scene from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. It has been practically overlooked that each book of the Bible, like each play of Shakespeare, is a unit in itself. The authors of these books wrote not because they had to say something but because they had something to say; when they had said it they stopped, or began another book. Try reading each book at a sitting and as if you had to furnish a subtitle for each, giving the main content of each book as you understand it. Thus, *Job*, or *Piety without Prosperity; Ecclesiastes*, or *Prosperity without Piety*.

Ecclesiastes recalls another writer who recognized

the book units in the Bible. "There is one immortal work that moves me still more," says Rider Haggard, whom we do not think of as owing much to the Bible, "a work that utters all the world's yearning anguish and disillusionment in one sorrow-laden and bitter cry, and whose stately music thrills like the voice of pines heard in the darkness of a midnight gale; and that is the book of *Ecclesiastes*."

Philip Gilbert Hamerton, the well-known writer on art, found a lasting delight in the poetry of Walter Scott because he and Scott were both lovers of lakes, hills, and streams. "I began with the poems, and read them so often that I almost knew them by heart before I had read a single page of the prose tales. *The Lady of the Lake* was my especial favourite, and I have no doubt that my early enthusiasm for that delightful poem implanted in me a love for beautiful lakes with romantic islands in them which had practical consequences afterward. Even to this day these feelings are as lively in me as ever, so that nothing in the world seems to me so completely delightful as a lake if one has a sailing-boat to wander over it. Scott, too, had the same love for hills and streams that I had imbibed from nature in my youth, and

in his narratives of adventure he suited my temper so exactly, that to read him was a complete satisfaction, without any drawback whatever. I am still a reader of Scott, and never appreciated the qualities of *Ivanhoe* so completely as on reading that masterpiece last year. Of all authors it is Scott who has given me the greatest sum of pleasure, and that of a very healthy kind."

Hamerton's own preferences remind us that it will not do to lay down hard and fast rules for reading. The main thing is to find the writer or writers, the book or books, that enrich your thinking by interpreting it. Sometimes the right book startles or warns you, sometimes it takes issue squarely with you, sometimes it reveals new powers latent in you, but in every case it reveals something in common with you, and on this common basis you rise toward its level. One would think that if Hamerton loved lakes, streams, and hills, he might have found a congenial spirit in the great nature poet, William Wordsworth. "But there was something in Wordsworth," says Hamerton, "that I found repellent, perhaps his belief in his own moral and intellectual excellence." When our own nature poet, William Cullen Bryant, first read Wordsworth, he said:

"A thousand springs seemed to gush up at once into my heart, and the face of nature changed of a sudden into a strange freshness and life." He had found a mind greater than his own, but thoroughly in sympathy with him. Like had met like. It was Lincoln and the Gettysburg audience again.

"When I was fifteen," says W. T. Stead, the great journalist who went down with the *Titanic*, "Dicks's *Shakespeare* was published in penny weekly numbers. I had never read any of his plays, and as I have never to this day witnessed the performance of any stage play, I was then in absolute ignorance of what Shakespeare meant. The first number contained two plays, *Hamlet* and *Othello*, at a halfpenny each. I shall never forget the shock — the bewildering shock — which I received from the last scene in *Hamlet*. So invariably had novelists, and even romantic poets like Scott, brought their heroes and heroines happily together before they left the stage, that it was some time before I could realize that in *Hamlet* all was different. The death of Ophelia had startled me; that was irretrievable, no doubt; but Hamlet might still be saved. But when at last death swept the board, and the curtain fell on

a universal shambles, I was dazed, angry, and incredulous. I read the play over again, not for the story this time; and then read *Othello*. It was one of the turning-points of my life. I was fascinated. Every week, until the series was complete, I devoured the two new plays contained in each number. They enormously widened the horizon of life; they added new and vivid colour to existence, and they intensified my perception of the tragic issues of love and of death that are bound up in every human heart. But that was not all; Shakespeare was to me the key to all literature." He was the key to all literature because he was the key to Mr. Stead's own heart.

But I like to consider the service that great writers have rendered to mankind at large, and not merely to those who were to become great writers themselves. The Gettysburg speech has doubtless helped thousands of orators and would-be orators, but it has helped tens of thousands of people who are not orators and who have never given expression to their indebtedness by tongue or pen. The greatest service of literature has been in behalf, not of professional writers and speakers, but of those who feel the need of a spokesman all the

more keenly because they lack the ability themselves to voice their own feelings. Great singers help other singers, but the pleasure that they give to those who are themselves unable to sing is many times greater than the service rendered to the few professionals. Most of us are songs without words, only the few know the words, but all feel the thrill when the words are sung. It may be sorrow, or joy, or mere perplexity, or dull indifference, but, whatever it is, it craves expression.

A poor woman, whose childhood had been the only happy period of her life, was struggling to make an honest living for herself, but had almost lost hope. She had moved to a little village in a far-off frontier state and was supporting herself by taking in washing. A preacher who had heard of her condition called and left some religious tracts. A few weeks later he called again and noticed a great change. "Before I entered the house," he said, "I detected a neatness and orderliness in the little front yard that I had not observed before. The woman herself seemed a different person. Instead of listlessness and despair there was hope and good cheer in her voice as she bade me enter. I asked her which one of the tracts she had found most helpful. 'Oh,' she re-

plied, 'I haven't read any of them yet. There is what I have been reading till I know it by heart,' " and she pointed to a newspaper clipping which she had pasted on the wall just above her washtub. The clipping contained Longfellow's poem *Maidenhood.* She had found it in a newspaper which had been used to wrap soiled clothing which had been sent to her to wash. The thoughts seemed to be her own but fuller and sweeter. The whole poem seemed to have been written by herself in some mood of exaltation that had now become but a memory. It recalled her early days, made clear to her the meaning of her early life, and thus restored her early ideals.

It is said that Longfellow was once driving in a closed carriage near Newcastle, England, when the carriage was suddenly halted and the door violently opened. Looking out the poet saw that he was surrounded by a group of coal-begrimed miners. His first thought was that he was about to be robbed. "Is this Mr. Longfellow?" asked one of the men. "It is," was the reply. "Well, sir, some of us heard that you were to pass here about this time and we got permission to come up out of the mine and see you. We just want to shake your hand and say, 'God bless the man that wrote *The Psalm of Life.*' "

There was a time when men did not feel the burden of the inexpressible, but that was before the dawn of civilization. They lived a primitive life, and emotion was so simple that it found a sufficient outlet in a shout, a groan, a laugh, a cry, a sigh, a gesture, or the movement of the whole body. This is true to-day of infants and savages. The Botocudos of South America have but one word to express both song and dance, and the only song they sing on great occasions is

Calani-a-a
Calani-a-ha.

This they repeat over and over again. Nobody knows what it means, but it evidently means very little of anything. The Botocudos like it, however, because it is the satisfying expression of a simple emotion.

Now, however, emotion has become very complex, and expression has not kept pace with it. Almost all modern poets have some reference to the relief that we feel in expression. Shakespeare, whom nothing seems to have escaped, says that words are "windy attorneys to their client woes." That is a very original way of saying that men need the services of competent lawyers for the

same reason that they need the services of competent words, namely, to help them out of trouble. Again, when Macduff, in *Macbeth*, is told that his wife and babies have been murdered, Shakespeare makes Malcolm say to him:

> Give sorrow words : the grief that does not speak
> Whispers the o'er-fraught heart, and bids it break.

In his famous poem called *Intimations of Immortality*. Wordsworth says:

> To me alone there came a thought of grief,
> A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
> And I again am strong.

Oliver Wendell Holmes goes a step further. He reminds us that however pathetic a man's life may have been, if that man succeeded in expressing his life in poetry, if he was able to tell the mystery and the tragedy of it all to others, he had his reward. The deeper grief is the grief of "the voiceless":

> Nay, grieve not for the dead alone
> Whose song has told their hearts' sad story —
> Weep for the voiceless, who have known
> The cross without the crown of glory!

Emerson expresses it in prose: "For all men live by truth, and stand in need of expression. In love, in art, in avarice, in politics, in labour, in games, we study to utter our painful secret. The man is only half himself, the other half is his expression."

But the strongest statement of the principle is given by a man who learned it through bitter experience, experience which he could never have endured if he had not had the gift of expression. Our Ladies of Sorrow, says Thomas De Quincey, are three. He means that grief (your grief and mine) has three stages of intensity. He thinks of these three stages as three realms or kingdoms presided over by our three "Ladies of Sorrow." The eldest, the Madonna, is named *Mater Lachrymarum*, Our Lady of Tears. She represents the kind of grief that finds easy, natural expression in tears. The second Sister is called *Mater Suspiriorum*, Our Lady of Sighs. She represents the grief that is too deep for tears but that finds a partial outlet in sighs.

"But the third Sister, who is also the youngest — hush! whisper whilst we talk of *her!* Her kingdom is not large, or else no flesh should live; but within that kingdom all power is hers. Her

head, turreted like that of Cybele, rises almost beyond the reach of sight. She droops not; and her eyes, rising so high, might be hidden by distance. But, being what they are, they cannot be hidden; through the treble veil of crape which she wears, the fierce light of a blazing misery, that rests nor for matins or for vespers, for noon of day or noon of night, for ebbing or for flowing tide, may be read from the very ground. She is the defier of God. She also is the mother of lunacies, and the suggestress of suicides. Deep lie the roots of her power; but narrow is the nation that she rules. For she can approach only those in whom a profound nature has been upheaved by central convulsions; in whom the heart trembles and the brain rocks under conspiracies of tempest from without and tempests from within. Madonna moves with uncertain steps, fast or slow, but still with tragic grace. Our Lady of Sighs creeps timidly and stealthily. But this youngest Sister moves with incalculable motions, bounding, and with tiger's leaps. She carries no key; for, though coming rarely amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all. And *her* name is *Mater Tenebrarum*, Our Lady of Darkness."

Just as grief is relieved by expression, so joy is heightened. This is what Tennyson means in the following familiar lines. The italics are my own:

> Break, break, break,
> On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!
> And I would that *my* tongue could utter
> The thoughts that arise in *me*.
>
> O well for the fisherman's boy,
> That he *shouts* with his sister at play!
> O well for the sailor lad,
> That he *sings* in his boat on the bay!

Why does Tennyson envy the sea? Because the sea can voice its grief. Like the wind it has a thousand moods but a voice for each. The sea and the wind, therefore, have from the earliest times been regarded by poets as possessors of a peculiar joy and freedom. Why is it well with the fisherman's boy and the sailor lad? Because in them, too, there is perfect correspondence between feeling and expression. The shout and the song are the adequate outlets of simple joy, just as the roar of the sea against its rocky shore is the adequate voice of an oceanic grief.

Macaulay has said: "As civilization advances, poetry almost necessarily declines." Do we not see now that the reverse is true? Is it not evident

that as civilization advances, our thoughts, our feelings, our moods, our ideals all become more and more complex and therefore stand more in need of literature to express them? One might as well say that as civilization advances, inventions necessarily decline. Inventions increase as our needs increase. It is otherwise with discoveries. A discovery may be made accidentally and may have no relation to human need, as, for example, the discovery of the mechanism of a fly's eye. But an invention always presupposes a felt want. So does poetry. It satisfies first a want in the soul of the writer, and if this be a national want, the poem becomes a national possession; if it be a universal want, the poem becomes a universal possession. The *Star-Spangled Banner* is an example of the first, *Hamlet* of the second. As civilization advances, the demand for poetry will increase, though the supply may not equal the demand.

The poets then have done more than all others to restore the equilibrium between feeling and expression. They have not succeeded — they will never succeed. There are emotions and moods that are so fleeting or so complex or so far from the surface that they defy the photography of words. The poet can only approximate, but

there is balm and uplift in the approximation. If he felt completely satisfied with his work, stagnation would result, but his ideal recedes and beckons to him as it recedes. And so with the reader. An ideal overtaken is no longer an ideal. But when it is nearly overtaken it seems suddenly to loom larger and fairer, and thus to suggest a higher and more distant ideal. Perhaps Milton preferred *Paradise Regained* to *Paradise Lost* because he came nearer to doing what he wanted to do in *Paradise Regained*, while in *Paradise Lost* there was a wider space between what he did and what he hoped to do.

But whatever you read remember that it is your own personality that you are trying to unlock. The poem or story or book, if it is the right one, should seem a sort of extension of yourself. You must carry, therefore, a large share of self-confidence and self-respect into your reading. You are looking for an outlet of your own soul rather than the inflow of another's. As a general thing you will find such an outlet in works written near your own time. But when the process of finding yourself has begun, you will be carried through many centuries and into many lands.

As wide and as varied, however, as the domain

of literature seems, the greatest works can be divided into only two classes. You often hear it said that a man or an event is famous in "song and story." Now this expression, "song and story," really means the whole realm of literature. It includes (1) lyric poetry, that is, the short poems that men in their joy or grief used to sing, and (2) the longer works, prose or verse, that tell a story. The other kinds of literature are modifications or combinations of these two.

The two best small collections of English lyric poems or song-literature are Palgrave's *Golden Treasury, with Additional Poems to the End of the Nineteenth Century* and *The Oxford Book of English Verse 1250–1900* chosen and edited by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. The first is the better known, but the second has the advantage of building on the first, and contains more than twice as many poems. You are not expected to like every poem in either of these collections, but if you will start with Burns or Campbell or Cowper or Scott or Tennyson you will be pretty sure to find a friend whose comradeship will mean a new era in your life. To these volumes should be added also a good collection of American short poems, such as is found in Augustus White Long's *American*

Poems 1776–1900 or in Edmund Clarence Stedman's *American Anthology 1787–1900*. You will find in either of these volumes every American poem that in school or home has made itself a part of the lyric heritage of the American people.

In story-literature, the literature that tells a tale, the best poems are those by Tennyson and Longfellow. Try *Locksley Hall* and *Enoch Arden* by Tennyson; *Evangeline*, *Hiawatha*, the *Courtship of Miles Standish*, and *Paul Revere's Ride* by Longfellow. In short prose tales America leads. The American short story is known all over the world for the skill with which it is told and the human appeal of its content. In fact French and American writers have brought the short story to such perfection that it has been proposed to join the two words with a hyphen and thus make a visible distinction between the short-story and the story that is merely short. Many excellent collections of short stories, American and foreign, have been made. Among them may be mentioned *The Short-Story: Specimens Illustrating Its Development*, by Professor Brander Matthews, which contains stories from many lands, and *The Best American Tales*, by Professor William P. Trent and Professor John B. Henneman. From

the charm of these short stories you will be led the longer stories which we call novels and dram and epic poems.

Whenever you get really interested in a great piece of literature one revelation will surely come to you. You will find that the element of beauty is never lacking. You will find it hard to say whether it is in the thought or in the language or in the suggestions prompted by both. But there it is. See deep enough or high enough or wide enough and you see beauty. This is the greatest lesson that art has to teach, and it is a lesson taught by every literary masterpiece whether it be one line or a whole book.

Literature, then, is within you. The masters only bring it out. It is to your soul that they cry "Open Sesame." Whenever you say of a poem or story, "That's what I have dimly felt before — or felt a thousand times before — but could never say," freedom through expression has begun. The masters have found you and you have begun to find yourself.

CHAPTER II

[redacted] Can Keep Before You the Vision of the Ideal

IT IS said that when Thorwaldsen, the great Danish sculptor, unveiled his statue of Christ he was seen to weep. His friends who had come to congratulate him were astonished to hear him say: "My genius is decaying." "What do you mean?" they asked. "This statue," he replied, "is the first of my works that I have ever felt completely satisfied with. Till now my ideal has always been far beyond what I could execute, but it is so no longer. I can never create a great work of art again." The principle that the great artist here expressed is true for all time. Whenever a man catches up with his ideal, whenever he is completely satisfied with his work, he is doomed. He cannot climb higher because he cannot imagine a height beyond that which he has already attained. He cannot reach another round on his ladder because for him there are no other rounds. He must either stand still or descend, and standing still is a kind of descent.

Robert Browning has written a great poem about Andrea del Sarto, the man who was called "the faultless painter." Andrea says that he does not have to make first sketches or outlines before beginning a new painting — all that is past. He has become so skilful with his brush that to imagine is to achieve. He can put "perfectly" upon the canvas any picture that comes into his mind. Is such a man to be envied? Andrea's friends think so, but Andrea himself envies his brother artists whose ideals march always in advance of actual achievement. They have something to strive for, something that eludes them, but is always beckoning to them. Andrea sums up the difference when he says:

> Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
> Or what's a heaven for?

These eloquent words contain almost the whole philosophy of idealism. A man's reach should exceed his grasp not only in art, but in all that he does or thinks.

In another poem, *The Last Ride Together*, Browning makes a rejected young lover find comfort in the thought that if his suit had been successful he would have stood upon the highest

imaginable round of happiness and achievement. Success would have meant failure because there would have been nothing beyond to spur him on. He calls to mind the great poets, sculptors, and musicians, but not one of them was completely satisfied with his work. Indeed the joy that each felt in his work was a joy that sprang from the thought that he was every day getting nearer the goal though the goal itself loomed fairer and further the nearer he came to it. This particular lover believed not only that a man's reach *should* exceed his grasp, but that in every case where a man had done worthily the world's work his reach *had* exceeded his grasp. It is no wonder that these noble lines, in which he sums up his survey, are treasured in the memory of thousands to-day who do their work better because they remember them:

> What hand and brain went ever paired?
> What heart alike conceived and dared?
> What act proved all its thought had been
> What will but felt the fleshly screen?

Whatever else you memorize in this book, do not fail to memorize these two quotations from Browning. They will stand you in good stead in many

an hour of temporary despondency and will he to turn many a stumbling-block into a steppir stone.

In Tennyson's poem, *The Voyage*, there is o ideal, "one fair Vision," but it assumed a fivefc shape. When far off it seemed unreal, merely t product of Fancy; but on a nearer view it w Virtue, then Knowledge, then Hope, then Liber Are not these the four most magnetic forms which the ideal appears? Notice, too, the fa of the man who could not or would not see t vision:

For one fair Vision ever fled
  Down the waste waters day and night,
And still we follow'd where she led,
  In hope to gain upon her flight.
Her face was evermore unseen,
  And fixed upon the far sea-line;
But each man murmur'd, "O my queen,
  I follow till I make thee mine!"

And now we lost her, now she gleam'd
  Like Fancy made of golden air.
Now nearer to the prow she seem'd
  Like Virtue firm, like Knowledge fair,
Now high on waves that idly burst
  Like Heavenly Hope she crown'd the sea,
And now, the bloodless point reversed,
  She bore the blade of Liberty.

And only one among us — him
We pleased not — he was seldom pleased:
He saw not far: his eyes were dim:
But ours he swore were all diseased.
"A ship of fools," he shriek'd in spite,
"A ship of fools," he sneer'd and wept,
And overboard one stormy night
He cast his body, and on we swept.

Rudyard Kipling, the greatest living English writer, is sometimes thought of chiefly as a drum and trumpet poet. Kipling undoubtedly believes in a fight, but he has written one great poem in which he plainly says that it is not the fight in itself that thrills him, but the nobleness of the ideal that nerves the fighter. It is enough, says Kipling, to see the ideal in dreams; it will never be reached till death. Elusive as it is, however — or, rather, because it is elusive — it has been the inspiration of every noble thought and deed, even when these are seemingly cancelled by death. Here are the first and third stanzas of his poem, *To The True Romance:*

Thy face is far from this our war,
Our call and counter-cry,
I shall not find Thee quick and kind,
Nor know Thee till I die.

Enough for me in dreams to see
And touch Thy garments' hem:
Thy feet have trod so near to God
I may not follow them!

Since spoken word Man's Spirit stirred
Beyond his belly-need,
What is is Thine of fair design
In Thought and Craft and Deed;
Each stroke aright of toil and fight,
That was and that shall be,
And hope too high wherefore we die,
Has birth and worth in Thee.

The ideal, then, like a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, has guided the march of nations as of individuals. And the poets have been its standard bearers. The poems cited treat the ideal directly. It is their theme. They attempt to define and expound it. But every masterpiece of literature, whatever its theme, is rooted in an ideal, reflects an ideal, and thus illustrates an ideal. It must be remembered that the ideal grows out of the real. The real is never a perfect pyramid: it is truncated. The top is missing. We vaguely feel the lack, but the poet visualizes the completed whole and then tells what he sees.

The ideal, therefore, which literature holds

before us, is the ideal of completeness. It is greater than any single ideal, such as the social ideal, or the educational ideal, or the political ideal, or the industrial ideal, or the spiritual ideal. It may, according to the theme, include all of these, but its essence is vision, the vision of a possible whole suggested by a part or parts. The poet simply completes the tendency to completeness that is felt by us all. When, now, this passion for completeness becomes an ingrained part of a man, affecting both his thinking and his doing, he may be sure that the ideal in all its beauty and power has come to dwell with him.

To see how literature helps to bring this about, let us glance at the two great themes that literature has always preferred to treat. These are nature, or the visible world about us, and personality, or the invisible world within us. We know none too much of either of these mysteries, the nature around us or the nature within us; but we should know far less and feel far less about them than we do, had it not been for the poets. In many cases they were the first to see the summit from the base, and thus to prophesy a whole where only a part was visible. Let us look first at nature. Has the vision of the poet added

anything to our knowledge of this great realm, or have the scientists been our only teachers?

John Tyndall, the great physicist, once said: "The greatest discoveries of science have been made when she has left the region of the seen and known, and followed the imagination by new paths to regions before unseen." "The most epoch-making discoveries," wrote recently Dr. Archibald Henderson, "find their origin in the fortunate conjunction of intuition and experience. And the whole history of science is the history of the struggle of man's intuition, fortified by experience, to read the inscrutable riddle of nature." It is also true that science has often verified what had already been fore-announced by the idealizing or completing faculty of the poet. Seventy-five years before Newton astonished the world with the law of gravitation, Shakespeare in his *Troilus and Cressida* wrote:

> But the strong base and building of my love
> Is as the very centre of the earth,
> Drawing all things to it.

In 1859 Darwin published his epoch-making work, *The Origin of Species*. This was the first time that the law of evolution was ever clearly

stated as a scientific theory, but the poets had long before been busy with the thought of evolution as an ideal. Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, published in 1850 but written earlier, contains this passage:

> They say,
> The solid earth whereon we tread
>
> In tracts of fluent heat began,
> And grew to seeming-random forms,
> The seeming prey of cyclic storms,
> Till at the last arose the man.

In Browning's *Paracelsus*, written in 1834, there is a long and eloquent passage about evolution which ends with these lines:

> Thus He dwells in all,
> From life's minute beginnings, up at last
> To man — the consummation of this scheme
> Of being, the completion of this sphere
> Of life: whose attributes had here and there
> Been scattered o'er the visible world before,
> Asking to be combined, dim fragments meant
> To be united in some wondrous whole,
> Imperfect qualities throughout creation,
> Suggesting some one creature yet to make,
> Some point where all those scattered rays should meet
> Convergent in the faculties of man.

Navigation of the air and the settlement of international difficulties by arbitration have made

more progress in the last ten years than in all the preceding centuries. The vision that Tennyson saw in 1842 and sketched in *Locksley Hall* will yet be realized:

For I dipped into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that would be;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly bales;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain'd a ghastly dew
From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro' the thunder-storm;

Till the war-drum throbb'd no longer, and the battle-flags were furl'd
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.

When Jules Verne, a prose poet, wrote in 1872 *Around the World in Eighty Days*, the book was not taken seriously. But with steamers crossing the Atlantic in less than six days, with Pacific liners making the trip from San Francisco to Yokohama in three weeks, and transcontinental

railroads spanning the intervening distances, forty days are now enough for the diligent globe-trotter where eighty days seemed incredibly short to Phileas Phogg. When Professor Röntgen was perfecting his discovery of the x-rays, but before any results had been announced, Charles S. Hinton published a prose romance called *Stella*, the plot of which is based on the possibility of seeing through the human body. *Stella* appeared in November, 1895, and a few months later the x-ray became a demonstrable fact.

The greatest inventor of delicate and accurate scientific instruments, especially electrical instruments, was Sir William Thomson, known since 1892 as Lord Kelvin. His inventions were all illustrations of the saying already quoted from Tyndall: "The greatest discoveries of science have been made when she has left the region of the seen and known, and followed the imagination by new paths to regions before unseen." Lord Kelvin's genius was the genius of vision. He did not take an old instrument and by ceaseless experimentation try to make it better. He let his imagination construct a perfect instrument and then put his scientific knowledge to work to build it. When he died in 1907 the London *Times* said of him:

"When he is done with a problem, there is no more to be done. The problem is solved once and for all. Say a thing is not delicate enough; most inventors proceed to make it a little more delicate, and are rather proud of doing so much. Lord Kelvin would ascertain by a masterly analysis of the whole case what was the *maximum* of possible delicacy, and would then bring to bear wide and various knowledge and singular fertility of mechanical resource in order to reach that *maximum*. His siphon-recorder, his compass, and his electrometers are instances of that thoroughness, alike in conception and execution, which marked his work. It flowed from that highest of intellectual qualities, the constructive scientific imagination, which 'bodies forth the forms of things unknown'* with such definition and precision that the mechanical faculties work up to the conception as to a visible model."

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*Notice that these words describing Lord Kelvin's method are taken from Shakespeare's famous description of the poet's method. See *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V, Scene 1, lines 12–17:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

There is no antagonism, therefore, between poetry and natural science. The poets believe that nature's reach exceeds her grasp. They study her reach, therefore, while the scientists study her grasp. But both poet and scientist are dependent on vision.

Let us turn now to the second theme that literature loves to treat, personality or human nature. The quotations already made from the English poets, Browning, Tennyson, and Kipling, might lead the reader to infer that American literature is deficient in poems of high human idealism. On the contrary there is no modern literature that is more nobly idealistic than our own. A German scholar, Eduard Engel, who has written an excellent little history of American literature, has this to say about our idealism: "The fundamental characteristic of American literature is its idealism. All really great American writers, all whom the Americans themselves consider great, have without exception been idealists, almost extreme idealists. American poets have been the real preachers of the nation. Poetry is to the Americans a sacred thing, and it is no accident that from an American poet, from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the world received

that beautiful poem, whose refrain, 'Excelsior!' has become the watchword of idealists in all lands."

This is high praise, but it is abundantly justified by the facts. Ex-President Eliot of Harvard goes still farther. "We are," he says, "the most idealistic people who have thus far inherited the planet. We are more idealistic in our conception of man, of God, and of the universe than any other people." It is at least a striking fact that the poets who best represent American life, Longfellow, Emerson, Poe, Lowell, Holmes, Whittier, and Lanier, have each written a poem which might justly be called "My Creed of Idealism." And Hawthorne's greatest story, *The Great Stone Face*, may well bear the same title. The poems are Longfellow's *Excelsior*, Emerson's *The Forerunners*, Poe's *Eldorado*, Lowell's *L'Envoi to the Muse*, Holmes's *Chambered Nautilus*, Whittier's *The Vanishers*, and Lanier's *Song of the Chattahoochee*. Each of these treatments of the ideal has won its deserved popularity because it gives outlet to a feeling common to us all. "Where there is no vision," said a philosopher three thousand years ago, "the people perish," and the proof of his saying is that, while all nations without a

literature have perished, the nations with a literature still live in their ideals. It is not ideas that make a people's civilization, it is ideals. Ideas are what people think, ideals are what they strive for. An idea is a ladder on the ground; an ideal is a ladder set up. If America should be suddenly blotted from the map the masterpieces that follow would still live to testify to future ages that the vanished Americans kept before them the vision of the ideal.

Excelsior is almost too well known to be reproduced in full. But Engel's remark about the international service that it has performed and Longfellow's own explanation of its meaning make it worth reading and re-reading till we know every stanza of it by heart.

The shades of night were falling fast,
As through an Alpine village passed
A youth, who bore, 'mid snow and ice,
A banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

His brow was sad; his eye beneath,
Flashed like a falchion from its sheath,
And like a silver clarion rung
The accents of that unknown tongue,
Excelsior!

In happy homes he saw the light
Of household fires gleam warm and bright;
Above, the spectral glaciers shone,
And from his lips escaped a groan,
Excelsior!

"Try not the Pass!" the old man said;
"Dark lowers the tempest overhead,
The roaring torrent is deep and wide!"
And loud that clarion voice replied,
Excelsior!

"Oh stay," the maiden said, "and rest
Thy weary head upon this breast!"
A tear stood in his bright blue eye,
But still he answered, with a sigh,
Excelsior!

"Beware the pine-tree's withered branch!
Beware the awful avalanche!"
This was the peasant's last Good-night,
A voice replied, far up the height,
Excelsior!

At break of day, as heavenward
The pious monks of Saint Bernard
Uttered the oft-repeated prayer,
A voice cried through the startled air,
Excelsior!

A traveller, by the faithful hound,
Half-buried in the snow was found,
Still grasping in his hand of ice
That banner with the strange device,
Excelsior!

There in the twilight cold and gray,
Lifeless, but beautiful, he lay,
And from the sky, serene and far,
A voice fell, like a falling star,
Excelsior!

Poe said that *Excelsior* depicted "the earnest upward striving of the soul — an impulse not to be subdued even in death." Longfellow himself, in a letter to C. K. Tuckerman, explained the meaning of his poem as follows: "I have had the pleasure of receiving your note in regard to the poem *Excelsior*, and very willingly give you my intention in writing it. This was no more than to display, in a series of pictures, the life of a man of genius, resisting all temptations, laying aside all fears, heedless of all warnings, and pressing right on to accomplish his purpose. His motto is *Excelsior*, 'higher.' He passes through the Alpine village — through the rough, cold paths of the world — where the peasants cannot understand him, and where the watchword is an 'unknown tongue.' He disregards the happiness of domestic peace and sees the glaciers — his fate — before him. He disregards the warning of the old man's wisdom and the fascinations of woman's love. He answers to all, 'Higher yet.' The

monks of Saint Bernard are the representative
religious forms and ceremonies, and with tl
oft-repeated prayer mingles the sound of his vo
telling them there is something higher than fo
and ceremonies. Filled with these aspirations,
perishes, without having reached the perfect
he longed for; and the voice heard in the air is
promise of immortality and progress ever upwar

The name of Emerson's poem, *The Forerunn*
is self-explanatory. The forerunners are th
eternal mysteries that forever beckon but fore
elude. Emerson, like Browning, emphasizes
unseizableness of the ideal. An ideal overtak
an ideal realized, ceases to be an ideal, thoug
may become the stepping-stone to another
still higher ideal. Emerson's poetry is not usu
as easy reading as Longfellow's, but no one
miss the meaning and message of *The Forerunn*

Long I followed happy guides,
I could never reach their sides;
Their step is forth, and, ere the day,
Breaks up their leaguer, and away.
Keen my sense, my heart was young,
Right good-will my sinews strung,
But no speed of mine avails
To hunt upon their shining trails.
On and away, their hasting feet

Make the morning proud and sweet;
Flowers they strew — I catch the scent;
Or tone of silver instrument
Leaves on the wind melodious trace;
Yet I could never see their face.
On eastern hills I see their smokes,
Mixed with mist by distant lochs.
I met many travellers
Who the road had surely kept;
They saw not my fine revellers —
These had crossed them while they slept.
Some had heard their fair report,
In the country or the court.
Fleetest couriers alive
Never yet could once arrive,
As they went or they returned,
At the house where these sojourned.
Sometimes their strong speed they slacken,
Though they are not overtaken;
In sleep their jubilant troop is near —
I tuneful voices overhear;
It may be in wood or waste —
At unawares 'tis come and past.
Their near camp my spirit knows
By signs gracious as rainbows.
I thenceforward and long after
Listen for their harp-like laughter,
And carry in my heart, for days,
Peace that hallows rudest ways.

Poe's little poem, *Eldorado*, appeared only a few months before his death. In it he tells of his

ceaseless search for the beautiful. No man ever lived in whom the passion for pure beauty burned more consumingly than in Edgar Allan Poe. Whatever his other failings he never compromised his ideals of poetic beauty. The advice that he gives in the last stanza —"Ride, boldly ride" even to death — is advice that he himself followed unfalteringly. "With me," he says, "poetry has been not a purpose, but a passion; and the passions should be held in reverence." To his friend, F. W. Thomas, he writes at the very time when *Eldorado* was stirring in his brain: "Depend upon it after all, Thomas, literature is the most noble of professions. In fact, it is about the only one for a man. For my own part there is no seducing me from the path. I shall be a *littérateur* at least, all my life; nor would I abandon the hopes which still lead me on for all the gold in California." In this farewell poem Poe bequeaths his ideal to posterity:

Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of Eldorado.

But he grew old —
This knight so bold —
And o'er his heart a shadow
Fell as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like Eldorado.

And, as his strength
Failed him at length,
He met a pilgrim shadow —
"Shadow," said he,
"Where can it be —
This land of Eldorado?"

"Over the Mountains
Of the Moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,"
The shade replied,
"If you seek for Eldorado."

In Longfellow's *Journal*, May 3, 1855, occurs e following entry: "Passed an hour with Lowell is morning. He read me a poem, *The Muse* — ry beautiful. It reminded me of Emerson's *rerunners*." The exact name of the poem is *Envoi to the Muse*. It treats, as Longfellow imies, the same great theme that Emerson had eated in *The Forerunners*. Longfellow might ve added, if modesty had not forbidden, that it eated also the same great theme that he himself

had made popular in *Excelsior*. The first twenty-four lines of Lowell's poem will give an idea of the whole:

Whither? Albeit I follow fast,
  In all life's circuit I but find,
Not where thou art, but where thou wast,
  Sweet beckoner, more fleet than wind!
I haunt the pine-dark solitudes,
  With soft brown silence carpeted,
And plot to snare thee in the woods;
  Peace I o'ertake, but thou art fled!
I find the rock where thou didst rest,
The moss thy skimming foot hath prest;
  All Nature with thy parting thrills,
Like branches after birds new-flown;
  Thy passage hill and hollow fills
With hints of virtue not their own;
In dimples still the water slips
Where thou has dipt thy finger-tips;
  Just, just beyond, forever burn
  Gleams of a grace without return;
  Upon thy shade I plant my foot,
And through my frame strange raptures shoot;
All of thee but thyself I grasp;
  I seem to fold thy luring shape,
And vague air to my bosom clasp,
  Thou lithe, perpetual Escape!

The last line, "Thou lithe, perpetual Escape," is an admirable definition of a lofty ideal, worthy to be put with anything that Browning has said

on the subject. Lowell, too, you observe, puts the emphasis on the unattainableness of the ideal. He finds the footprints of the ideal everywhere, "In all life's circuit," but the ideal itself he cannot clasp.

"*The Chambered Nautilus*," says Holmes, "was suggested by looking at a section of one of those chambered cells to which is given the name of Pearly Nautilus." A recent biographer of Holmes says: "*The Chambered Nautilus* is perhaps the only bit of his verse which has the artistic completeness which enables it to stand alone." In what does its artistic completeness consist? It consists in the skilful way in which Holmes has taken a bit of scientific knowledge and humanized it for daily need. The splendid idealism of the last stanza has made it the most enduring shrine of its author's name and fame. There is perhaps no other single stanza in our literature that is known by heart by more Americans than the last stanza of *The Chambered Nautilus:*

This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,
Sails the unshadowed main —
The venturous bark that flings
On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings
In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings,
And coral reefs lie bare,
Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their streaming hair.

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;
Wrecked is the ship of pearl!
And every chambered cell,
Where its dim dreaming life was wont to dwell,
As the frail tenant shaped his growing shell,
Before thee lies revealed —
Its irised ceiling rent, its sunless crypt unsealed!

Year after year beheld the silent toil
That spread his lustrous coil;
Still, as the spiral grew,
He left the past year's dwelling for the new,
Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
Built up its idle door,
Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no more.

Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea,
Cast from her lap, forlorn!
From thy dead lips a clearer note is born
Than ever Triton blew from wreathèd horn!
While on mine ear it rings,
Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that sings:

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

There are those who say that Holmes borrowed some of his thoughts from a poem called *An Elegy*

on a shell: The Nautilus, by Dr. Samuel L. Mitchill. Here are the three best stanzas of Doctor Mitchill's poem. Judge for yourself·

> Thou wast a house with many chambers fraught,
> Built by a Nautilus or Argonaut,
> With fitness, symmetry, and skill,
> To suit the owner's taste and sovereign will.
>
> In curves of elegance thy shape appears,
> Surpassing art through centuries of years,
> By tints and colours brilliant made,
> And all, — the finished workman has displayed.
>
> So man erects in sumptuous mode
> A structure proud for his abode,
> But knows not, when of life bereft,
> Who'll creep within the shell he left.

Is it not evident that Mitchill's poem has not a ray of idealism? Compare his last stanza with Holmes's. To Mitchill the nautilus suggests not human life but a house, and he concludes by reminding us that men do not know who will move into their houses when they are dead. There's truth of a sort but no poetry, no uplift, no challenge in that thought. Indeed Mitchill's whole poem lives to-day only in the reflected fame of Holmes's lines.

The name of Whittier's poem, *The Vanishers*,

also suggests Emerson's *Forerunners*. Whittier, however, took the suggestion of his lines not from Emerson but from an Indian legend. "I take the liberty," he writes to a friend, "of enclosing a little poem of mine which has beguiled some weary hours. I hope thee will like it. How strange it seems not to read it to my sister! If thee have read Schoolcraft* thee will remember what he says of the Puck-wud-jinnies or 'little vanishers.' The legend is very beautiful and I hope I have done it justice in some sort." The first two and last two stanzas will give an idea of the whole:

Sweetest of all childlike dreams
In the simple Indian lore
Still to me the legend seems
Of the shapes who flit before.

Flitting, passing, seen and gone,
Never reached nor found at rest,
Baffling search, but beckoning on
To the Sunset of the Blest.

* The reference is to Henry Rowe Schoolcraft (1793–1864) who at the request of Congress edited his *Historical and Statistical Information Respecting the History, Condition, and Prospects of the Indian Tribes of the United States* (5 volumes, 1851–1855). There are more than 300 illustrations in these volumes and the cost to Congress was about $30,000 a volume. Schoolcraft added a sixth volume in 1857. Longfellow also drew from Schoolcraft for his *Hiawatha*. Congress never made an appropriation that yielded better returns.

Guided thus, O friend of mine!
Let us walk our little way,
Knowing by each beckoning sign
That we are not quite astray

Chase we still, with baffled feet,
Smiling eye and waving hand,
Sought and seeker soon shall meet,
Lost and found, in Sunset Land!

In spite of the general resemblance between this poem and Emerson's *Forerunners*, *The Vanishers* could hardly have been written by Emerson. The religious faith and hope of the Quaker poet have made his name a household word among thousands of readers to whom Emerson is still a sealed book. With Whittier all high ideals will find their full realization in Heaven, "the Sunset Land of Souls." His idealism drew its chief inspiration and support from that world-fountain of idealism, the Bible. It is an idealism not essentially different from Emerson's, but it is differently expressed.

The last poem that I shall mention, *The Song of the Chattahoochee* by Sidney Lanier, sprang into immediate popularity and remains the best known short poem that its author wrote. The Chattahoochee River, it should be said, rises in Habersham County, in northeastern Georgia, and in its

southwesterly course flows through the adjoinin Hall County. Its length is about five hundre miles. In melody and meaning this poem i characteristic of Lanier at his best:

Out of the hills of Habersham,
Down the valleys of Hall,
I hurry amain to reach the plain,
Run the rapid and leap the fall,
Split at the rock and together again,
Accept my bed, or narrow or wide,
And flee from folly on every side
With a lover's pain to attain the plain
Far from the hills of Habersham,
Far from the valleys of Hall.

All down the hills of Habersham,
All through the valleys of Hall,
The rushes cried *Abide, abide,*
The wilful waterweeds held me thrall,
The laving laurel turned my tide,
The ferns and the fondling grass said *Stay,*
The dewberry dipped for to work delay,
And the little reeds sighed *Abide, abide,*
Here in the hills of Habersham,
Here in the valleys of Hall.

High o'er the hills of Habersham,
Veiling the valleys of Hall,
The hickory told me manifold
Fair tales of shade, the poplar tall
Wrought me her shadowy self to hold,

The chestnut, the oak, the walnut, the pine,
Overleaning, with flickering meaning and sign,
Said, *Pass not, so cold, these manifold*
Deep shades of the hills of Habersham,
These glades in the valleys of Hall.

And oft in the hills of Habersham,
And oft in the valleys of Hall,
The white quartz shone, and the smooth brook-stone
Did bar me of passage with friendly brawl,
And many a luminous jewel lone —
Crystals clear or a-cloud with mist,
Ruby, garnet, and amethyst —
Made lures with the lights of streaming stone
In the clefts of the hills of Habersham,
In the beds of the valleys of Hall.

But, oh, not the hills of Habersham,
And, oh, not the valleys of Hall
Avail: I am fain for to water the plain.
Downward the voices of Duty call —
Downward, to toil and be mixed with the main,
The dry fields burn, and the mills are to turn,
And a myriad flowers mortally yearn,
And the lordly main from beyond the plain
Calls o'er the hills of Habersham,
Calls through the valleys of Hall.

The Song of the Chattahoochee has often been compared with Tennyson's *Brook*, but there is no resemblance between them except that water flows through both. The best poem with which to compare it is Longfellow's *Excelsior*. Both are

treatments of idealism in action, but it is a different kind of action. Longfellow pictures the search for the ideal under the form of a young mountain climber who moves upward but away from men, while Lanier sees in the course of the Chattahoochee the type of the idealist who hurries down from the hills to serve in the plain. Personal perfection is the goal of the one, social service of the other. Thirty-six years (1841 to 1877) intervene between the two poems, and these years mark a steady national progress from the individual ideal of the first poem to the communal ideal of the second.

But the best philosophy of idealism was given by St. Paul when he said: "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory," and the best commentary on these words is Hawthorne's *Great Stone Face.* This wonderful story can only be summarized here: There is in the White Mountains of New Hampshire a freak of nature known as the Great Stone Face. The expression of the Face is kind and noble, and there was a tradition in the valley that there would some day appear a great man with the very countenance of the Great Stone Face. This man was to be a sort of saviour of the people.

Ernest, a little boy living in the valley, heard from his mother's lips the tradition of the Great Stone Face and lived in eager expectation of the coming of the great man thus foretold. The changing but always noble look of the Great Stone Face had an increasing influence upon the development of Ernest's character. By looking and longing he was being slowly "changed into the same image."

Three times, as the years went by, it was confidently proclaimed in the valley that the great man so long foretold was about to come. Ernest goes out each time to welcome him but returns disappointed. The people believed the resemblance complete but Ernest did not. "Old Mr. Gathergold," a type of the merely rich man, "Old Blood-and-Thunder," a type of the military hero, and "Old Stony Phiz," a popular type of the statesman, though they possessed some admirable qualities and had done some service for their country, did not have, as Ernest thought, "the gentle wisdom, the deep, broad, tender sympathies" of the Great Stone Face.

At length, after Ernest had become an old man, a poet visited the valley. He too had been born in the valley and had felt the influence of the Great Stone Face. He was a poet (1) of nature and (2)

of personality: (1) "If he sang of a mountain, the eyes of all mankind beheld a mightier grandeur reposing on its breast, or soaring to its summit, than had before been seen there. If his theme were a lovely lake, a celestial smile had now been thrown over it, to gleam forever on its surface. If it were the vast old sea, even the deep immensity of its dread bosom seemed to swell the higher, as if moved by the emotions of the song. Thus the world assumed another and a better aspect from the hour that the poet blessed it with his happy eyes. The Creator had bestowed him, as the last best touch to his own handiwork. Creation was not finished till the poet came to interpret, and so complete it. (2) The effect was no less high and beautiful, when his human brethren were the subject of his verse. The man or woman, sordid with the common dust of life, who crossed his daily path, and the little child who played in it, were glorified, if he beheld them in his mood of poetic faith. He showed the golden links of the great chain that intertwined them with an angelic kindred; he brought out the hidden traits of a celestial birth that made them worthy of such kin."

He and Ernest talked long together and Ernest

hoped that the great man had at last come. The poet, however, confessed to Ernest that his deeds were not in harmony with his words. "Suddenly the poet, by an irresistible impulse, threw his arms aloft, and shouted, 'Behold! Behold! Ernest is himself the likeness of the Great Stone Face!' Then all the people looked and saw that what the deep-sighted poet said was true. The prophecy was fulfilled. But Ernest, having finished what he had to say, took the poet's arm and walked slowly homeward, still hoping that some wiser and better man than himself would by and by appear, bearing a resemblance to the Great Stone Face."

Hawthorne's story sets forth all that this chapter has tried to suggest. Ernest had set his ideal high and was thus saved from being the victim of the popular and passing ideals of money, war, and politics. Though he still looked for a better man, his own recognition and reward had come. It was a poet, however, who found him and crowned him, and thus made him one of the world's torch-bearers of idealism. Painting, sculpture, and music are also outlets of the ideal within us. But not one of them equals literature in the clearness with which it speaks or in the numbers whom it has helped to the higher life.

CHAPTER III

It Can Give You a Better Knowledge of Human Nature

HUMAN nature can be learned from every kind of literature. Even lyric poetry, which does not attempt to create character, reflects at least the character of the writer. Take, for example, William Cullen Bryant's great lyric poem, *Thanatopsis*. Suppose, now, that you knew absolutely nothing about Bryant except that he was the author of this poem. How much of his human nature could you infer from this poem alone? Read it very carefully with this end in view and see if you agree with these findings: First, he was not only an observer but a lover of nature, at least of nature's "visible forms," the sun, the sky, the ocean, woods, meadows, and mountains. His descriptions, in other words, are not only accurate but affectionate. Second, he seems to have been either a very young man or a very old man when he wrote *Thanatopsis* because

the poem is chiefly about the fear of death, or rather about nature as an antidote to the fear of death. Is it not chiefly to the young or to the old that "thoughts of the last bitter hour come like a blight"? I should incline to the guess that the author was a very young man because his philosophy is immature and thin. As we grow older, nature means a great deal more to us than that at death we shall lie down in good company and have a glorious sepulchre. Third, there is a dignity and simplicity and sincerity in the words and thoughts that seem to be the reflection of the author's character. If he was not himself noble and genuine he was a master in the art of making the style conceal the writer. Fourth, whether young or old his use of beautiful vowel-combinations and sonorous words and phrases marks him out as peculiarly gifted in his feeling for the musical qualities of language. Read almost any of the lines of *Thanatopsis* aloud and you cannot help feeling that the author's ear for word music was almost perfect. As this quality is well sustained from the beginning of the poem to the end I should expect to find it reappear in every poem that the author wrote. Fifth, the close of the poem shows that the author was not unwilling to

have his poems end with a formal moral, a sort of "This-fable-teaches-us." As the moral, though beautiful in itself, is not closely connected with what precedes, I should say that the author had the habit of moralizing.

Try the same method with other poems by other authors. There is always the autobiographical element and the attempt to find it will show you that style, as Carlyle puts it, is not the coat of a writer but his skin. Then take poems that are national favourites — *The Star-Spangled Banner* by Francis Scott Key, *Home, Sweet Home* by John Howard Payne, *America* by Samuel Francis Smith, *The Bivouac of the Dead* by Theodore O'Hara, *The Blue and the Gray* by Francis Miles Finch, *Little Boy Blue* by Eugene Field — and study in them the character of the nation that has taken them to heart. There is danger here that you may overrate the nation's real approval of the poems selected. But you will learn at any rate that just as a man expresses himself in what he writes, so a whole people expresses itself in what it likes. It is to be hoped, too, that the historians of literature will take more pains to find out how popular or unpopular a poem really is before they hold it up to us as a mirror of

national taste. Popularity is not a high test of literary excellence but it is a sure test of a people's taste.

All literature, then, reveals unconsciously something of the men who made it and something also of the people who like or dislike it. But we wish now to study human nature not as it is unconsciously revealed in literature, but as it is consciously created in literature. We have in mind not lyric poetry but great epics, dramas, novels, and short stories. We are thinking not of the men who wrote these but of the men and women who move through their pages, who give them interest and immortality, and who are themselves more alive than their creators. A study of these men and women, we hold, will greatly widen and deepen your knowledge of human nature. There is no chair of human nature in any of our schools or colleges, though it must be admitted that a knowledge of human nature will yield better returns than a knowledge of anything else. In most professions success is not only conditioned on, but is in almost exact proportion to, a wide and sympathetic knowledge of our fellow-men. No one can expect to be a useful teacher, preacher, doctor, editor, lawyer, business-man, employer,

or employee who is ignorant of the motives that govern men in the ordinary affairs of life. Knowledge here is power and opportunity, ignorance is weakness and inefficiency. The knowledge that we get from everyday experience may be good as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. It is neither broad enough nor deep enough. To make it broader and deeper we must go to the great laboratory of character creation that the masters have fitted up and made accessible to us in literature.

What a strange company it is — these men and women who were not born but made! They are not ghosts, for they never wore flesh. They are alive, actively and increasingly alive. Try them by the tests of real life: Do they not influence others? Are they not talked about and written about and thought about? Do they show signs of weakness or old age? Have they not become a part of the very consciousness of men? Do not some of them keep alive the memory of nations otherwise forgotten? Are not many of them found in that "choir invisible whose music is the gladness of the world"? Have they not linked man to man, and nation to nation, and century to century by furnishing a common theme of thought and a com-

mon centre of association? Of one of these made characters Dr. Horace Howard Furness says: "No one of mortal mould (save Him 'whose blessed feet were nailed for our advantage on the bitter cross') ever trod this earth, commanding such absorbing interest as this Hamlet, this mere creation of a poet's brain."

To create character, to give immortality to a name, to send a human being down the ages as a comrade to all sorts and conditions of men, requires genius of the highest order. It demands a blend of heart and head, of observation and experience, of self-knowledge and self-effacement that would hardly be believed if the characters themselves were not here to vouch for it. Yet, even if we omit Shakespeare's minor men and women, he alone is the author of two hundred and forty-six distinct and well-known characters. When we consider the variety of these characters and also the perfect clearness with which they are portrayed, we are compelled to give Shakespeare the preëminence over all other authors, ancient and modern. In George Eliot's novels the distinct characters number one hundred and seven; in the novels of Dickens, one hundred and two; and in the novels of Thackeray, forty. Thus

Shakespeare has created almost as many characters as the three nineteenth-century novelists combined.*

A list of some of the best known characters created in world-literature will help us to realize what a wealth of material for the study of human nature this kind of literature affords. No two lists would be alike. Mine at least is brief. It is arranged also in chronological order and contains only such comment as, it is hoped, may lead you to the original sources themselves. Of every character mentioned it may be said that he or she is better known from the inside than the creator of the character himself. If you follow out this course of reading, whether alone or with others, do not do it as an imposed task. Above all do not read as if you had to stand an examination on the result. Read to find and to enrich yourself in a larger knowledge of human nature. Use translations when necessary and do not hesitate, if you so desire, to skip the passages or pages

*He has really created more. "The number [two hundred and forty-six] is made up by counting only those which have in the reader's mind a distinct individuality, and omitting the following plays entirely: *Richard III, Timon of Athens, Troilus and Cressida, Henry VIII,* and the three parts of *Henry VI,* either by reason of some doubt of Shakespeare's entire authorship or because his manner of sharply outlining a character and definitely filling it out is not evident in them." — Charles F. Johnson's *Elements of Literary Criticism.*

from which your hero or heroine is absent. Read as many pages as possible at a sitting, keep close to the trail of the hunted character, and then try to carry the knowledge and sympathy thus gained into the life about you.

My list of fifteen includes Ulysses in Homer's *Iliad* and especially in his *Odyssey*,* King Arthur in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*† and Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, Beatrice in Dante's *Divine Comedy*,‡ Don Quixote in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*,** Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* (Parts I and II) and *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Hamlet in Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, Robinson Crusoe in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Faust in Goethe's *Faust*,‡‡ Leatherstocking in James Fenimore Cooper's

* William Cullen Bryant's translations of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are the simplest translations in verse. But the prose translation of the *Iliad* by Leaf, Lang, and Myers and of the *Odyssey* by Butcher and Lang are better still. *The Story of the Iliad* and *The Story of the Odyssey* by Alfred J. Church are helpful introductory books.

† There is a good edition in two volumes with an introduction by Sir John Rhys in Everyman's Library. The best introductory volume is Sidney Lanier's *The Boy's King Arthur*.

‡ The standard translation is by Henry F. Cary, "to whom," says Macaulay, "Dante owes more than ever poet owed to translator." This translation has now been edited and brought up to date by Oscar Kuhns.

** An excellent edition is *Don Quixote for Use in Homes and Schools* by Clifton Johnson. The standard translation is by Peter Anthony Motteux. It is published in two volumes in Bohn's Standard Library and in Everyman's Library.

‡‡ The standard English translation is by Bayard Taylor.

Leatherstocking Tales, Pippa in Robert Browning's *Pippa Passes*, Becky Sharp in Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, David Copperfield in Dickens's *David Copperfield*, Silas Marner in George Eliot's *Silas Marner*, Jean Valjean in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, and Uncle Remus in Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, and *Nights with Uncle Remus*.

1. In range and permanence of influence upon mankind in general, the character and career of Ulysses remain unrivalled. Of the two types of character represented by Ulysses and Achilles, Ulysses seems to me plainly Homer's favourite. Achilles is the type of the warrior-hero cut down in his prime before physical prowess had begun to yield to years and reflection. Ulysses is the eternal type of the roving hero, familiar with strange lands and stranger folk, wise, patient, eloquent, and, above all, resourceful. "In the *Odyssey*," says Jebb, "we find a riper moral sense than in the *Iliad*, and a much larger number of words to express moral distinctions." But it was not the morality or the immorality of Ulysses that enthroned him in the Greek consciousness. It was his ability to shift for himself. It was his fertility in devising and executing things. He

became the permanent chairman of the Greek ways and means committee. He was the first great Greek that saw life steadily and saw it whole. Hebrew righteousness was not his nor the Christian ideal of service to others. But he had in him the stuff on which efficient righteousness must build. Every year of his wandering deprived him of friends and helpers till at last he fronted the world naked and alone. But neither gods nor men nor sirens could unsphere him. His resourcefulness was not only unfailing but cumulative, and the goal that beckoned him on — the thought of wife and son — invests him with a human interest far beyond that of the mere fighter.

It is no wonder that this heroic figure helped to mould the character and institutions of Greece. He was the Great Stone Face to which young and old, artists and statesmen, looked for inspiration. His strength prophesied greater strength, his wisdom deeper wisdom, his victories a nation's victories. To read the *Odyssey* is to read Greek history in prophecy, and human nature in summary. All that he did has become representative and has wrought itself into world-speech. "The lotus-eaters," "the Cyclops," "the bag of

winds," "Circe's enchantments," "the Sirens' island," "Scylla and Charybdis," "Phæacian hospitality," "the bow of Ulysses" — these have become channels of universal thought. The wandering Jew became a rover because he had violated a divine law, Ulysses is a world-traveller because he represents an eternal quest of the human spirit.

2. King Arthur is not a wanderer — he is not a person at all. He is a cause, re-shaped by every century to meet its own needs. All through the Middle Ages poets and prose writers vied with one another in exalting Alexander the Great, Charlemagne, and King Arthur. About each of these names there gathered vast story-cycles. After the Crusades, however, the desire was felt for a character that would express in a popular way the knightly ideals of Christian chivalry. Alexander the Great was too purely pagan for this service, and Charlemagne's career was too well known. By a kind of spiritual instinct the poets and romancers of Christendom seemed to unite upon King Arthur. Not much was known about him. If he ever lived he was a Welshman, not an Englishman. The tradition is that he fought a losing fight against the incoming Saxons, but

about the year 520 A. D. gained a notable victory. Peace followed, then insurrection, then the defeat and death of the King.

The English-speaking world owes its knowledge of King Arthur to Sir Thomas Malory, an English knight, who prepared a prose edition of these stories in 1469. It was called *Morte d' Arthur* (*The Death of Arthur*), and was printed by the first English printer, William Caxton, in 1485. Caxton disliked the title and added in his quaint English: "Thus endeth this noble and joyous book, entitled *Le Morte d' Arthur*, notwithstanding it treateth of the birth, life, and acts of the said King Arthur, of his noble knights of the Round Table, their marvellous enterprises and adventures, the achieving of the Holy Grail, and, in the end, the dolorous death and departing out of this world of them all." Numerous re-shapings of Malory's material have appeared since 1485, some in drama, some in opera, some in short story, some in epic poetry, some in lyric poetry. The best known is Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. Tennyson's contribution to the legends was not a clearer portrait of the King but a more modern interpretation of knightly duty. Arthur was made the mouthpiece of the new ideals, but he

remains a trifle cold and impersonal. In fact the character of the King still waits its adjustment to modern needs. His tomb at Glastonbury contains the words, "Here lies King Arthur, a King that was, a King that shall be." His real coronation will come later. He may be made to sum up a past, to interpret a present, or to hint a future. His last battle may be transferred to alien soils, but if he comes into his own he will typify, I think, the immortality of lost causes when faith and honour are not lost. This was the idea that was stirring dimly in Malory's imagination when he named his book not *The Life* but *The Death of King Arthur.* In other words, the King's last battle was a victorious defeat.

3. King Arthur and Beatrice are both of the Middle Ages, but there the resemblance ends. King Arthur represents a conception only partly worked out, Beatrice an ideal completely worked out. King Arthur belongs to no author, but if Dante be taken literally, Beatrice inspired him no less than he immortalized her. The closeness and spiritual beauty of the relationship between the two find no parallel in literature. Boccaccio, who, as a little boy, may have seen the great poet, tells us that Dante first met

Beatrice at a May festival in the year 1274. "From that time forward" says Dante, "love quite governed my soul. . . . And here it is fitting for me to depart a little from this present matter, that it may be rightly understood of what surpassing virtue her salutation was to me. To the which end I say that when she appeared in any place, it seemed to me, by the grace of her excellent salutation, that no man was my enemy any longer; and such warmth of charity came upon me that most certainly in that moment I would have pardoned whosoever had done me an injury; and if one should then have questioned me concerning any matter, I could only have said unto him 'Love,' with a countenance clothed in humbleness." He bids farewell to her in Paradise in these words:

O lady! thou in whom my hopes have rest,
Who, for my safety, didst not scorn to leave
In Hell the traces of thy footsteps marked, —
For all mine eyes have seen I to thy power
And goodness, virtue owe and grace. From slave
Thou hast to freedom brought me, and no means,
For my deliverance apt, hast left untried.
Thy liberal graciousness still to me keep,
That, when my spirit, which thou madest whole,
Is loosened from this body, it may find
Favour with thee.

Between the meeting and the farewell lie the beginning and the end of Dante's life work. She was the inspiration both of *The New Life* and of *The Divine Comedy*. It was at Beatrice's request that Virgil, who represents reason, guided Dante through Hell and Purgatory as far as unaided reason could lead, and it was Beatrice herself that led him through Paradise. The chief difference between the punishments in Hell and in Purgatory is that in Hell they are accompanied by loud outcries and blasphemies, while in Purgatory the sufferers sing the sweet old hymns of hope and praise. In the highest circle of Paradise is the Virgin Mary, in the second circle Eve, in the third Rachel with Beatrice. Longfellow, in his beautiful sonnet on the *Divina Commedia*, the "mediæval miracle of song," whose lines

> Are footpaths for the thought of Italy,

compares Dante's work to a dim, restful cathedral:

> So, as I enter here from day to day
> And leave my burden at this minster gate,
> Kneeling in prayer, and not ashamed to pray,
> The tumult of the time disconsolate
> To inarticulate murmurs dies away,
> While the eternal ages watch and wait.

But the most radiant figure in the great cathedral, as in the life of its builder, is Beatrice Por-

tinari. She is still the most spiritual presence in the world's picture-gallery, the incarnation of that romantic conception of ideal love that etherealized and ennobled the aspirations of the Middle Ages.

4. The variety of creative achievement that world-fiction presents could hardly be better shown than in the contrast between Beatrice and Don Quixote. The latter, however, is as safely immortal as the former. If Beatrice sums up the ideals of the Middle Ages, Don Quixote announces the passing of the Middle Ages and the coming of our own time. If in Ulysses we study a race, in Don Quixote we study an institution. If King Arthur stands for chivalry in flower, Don Quixote stands for its decline and fall. Cervantes published the first part of *Don Quixote* in 1605, the second part in 1615. His purpose was "to render abhorred of men the false and absurd stories contained in books of chivalry." Not the spirit of chivalry but the perversion of that spirit was the point of attack with Cervantes.

Don Quixote himself is one of the most lovable men in fiction. He is gentle, true, brave, pure, and considerate of others. But he is a monomaniac. "At last," says Cervantes, "he gave himself up so wholly to the reading of romances

that at night he would pore over them until it was day, and by day he would read on until it was night. Thus by sleeping little and reading much, the moisture of his brain was exhausted to that extent that at last he lost the use of his reason. A world of disorderly notions, picked out of his books, crowded into his imagination, and now his head was full of nothing but enchantments, quarrels, battles, challenges, wounds, complaints, amours, tournaments, and abundance of stuff and impossibilities, insomuch that all the fables and fantastical tales which he read seemed to him as true as the most authentic histories. . . . Having thus lost his understanding, he unluckily stumbled upon the oddest fancy that ever entered unto a madman's brain; for now he thought it proper and necessary, as well for the increase of his own honour as for the service of the public, to turn knight-errant and roam through the whole world, armed cap-a-pie and mounted on his steed, in quest of adventures."

After many years spent with his squire, Sancho Panza, in foolish contests with windmills, inn-keepers, funeral processions, goat-herds, lions, prisoners, and what not, he falls sick and shortly before death recovers his reason. In the last

chapter he is made to say: "My judgment is now free and clear, and the murky clouds of ignorance are dissipated which my continual reading of those detestable books of knight-errantry cast over me. Now I perceive their nonsense and deceit and am only sorry the discovery happens so late, when I lack time to make amends by reading others that might enlighten my soul. I find, niece, that I am at the point of death and I would meet it in such a manner as to show that my life has not been so evil as to leave me the reputation of a madman. . . . I am now an enemy to Amadis de Gaul* and all the endless crowd of his descendants. All the profane stories of knight-errantry are hateful to me. I have a sense of my folly and the danger I have run by reading them. And now, through heaven's mercy and my own experience, I abhor them."

The government of Spain had long considered the propriety of burning all knight-errantry romances, but after the appearance of *Don Quixote* no others were published. The book attained a popularity unequalled by any other book up to that time. Its hero and his squire represent two

* When Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote*, the chivalric adventures of Amadis de Gaul had been spun out to a length of fifty volumes.

unchanging types of character. Don Quixote is the man of imagination without common sense, while Sancho Panza is the man of common sense without imagination. Never before had these two types been so appealingly portrayed. To read between the lines in this book is to understand the old conflict of the impossible-sublime with the commonplace-possible and to feel anew the pity and the pathos of one-sidedness.

No one knows when Cervantes was born, but he and Shakespeare both died on April 23, 1616. Cervantes lives chiefly by one character, Shakespeare by so many that it is difficult to make choice. Two, however, stand out above the rest: Falstaff and Hamlet. Brunetière declared a few years ago that great creative writers usually portray one or more "sympathetic characters," the sympathetic character being the character that best represents the author's own point of view. Falstaff and Hamlet, he thought, were the two characters with whom, whether consciously or not, the dramatist was most in sympathy. This is an interesting theory, though for myself I should name Hamlet and Prospero* as the two most Shakespearean characters. Falstaff and Hamlet,

*See Shakespeare's *Tempest*.

however, are undoubtedly the best illustrations of Shakespeare's range. They are illustrations also of the wealth of material that the student of human nature may find in fiction.

5. Falstaff and Don Quixote have often been bracketed together as the most laughter-provoking characters in modern literature. So they are, doubtless, but with a difference. Cervantes himself does not seem to me a humourist at heart. I think of him as one who remembered easily and used aptly all the good stories that he had heard, but I do not believe that he could create humour at will. He could combine and adapt with effortless facility, but creation is something essentially different. Certainly Don Quixote is not at bottom a humourist; he is funny only when under the mad obsession of an outworn institution. In his normal stay-at-home moods he is at the utmost remove from humour or wit or brilliancy of any kind. He is not a complex character at all. But Falstaff is more complex than Hamlet. He has about him the suggestion of a gentleman and the instincts of a scholar, but when his hair is white he is the leader of a crew of ignorant and lawless tavern roisterers. His very essence, however, is humorous vivacity. He does not suggest

repetitions or adaptations: he can create humour at any time, in any society, at any crisis. "If anybody," says Walter Bagehot, "could have any doubt about the liveliness of Shakespeare, let them consider the character of Falstaff. When a man has created *that* without a capacity for laughter, then a blind man may succeed in describing colours. Intense animal spirits are the single sentiment (if they be a sentiment) of the entire character. If most men were to save up all the gaiety of their whole lives, it would come about to the gaiety of one speech in Falstaff. A morose man might have amassed many jokes, might have observed many details of jovial society, might have conceived a Sir John, marked by rotundity of body, but could hardly have imagined what we call his rotundity of mind. We mean that the animal spirits of Falstaff give him an easy, vague, diffusive sagacity which is peculiar to him."

And yet, singularly enough, the word honour unites and explains the diverse careers and characters of Don Quixote and Falstaff. Don Quixote sees life through the convex mirror of an utterly fantastic sense of honour. This and this alone makes him funny. Falstaff is funny because he believes and practises the theory that there

no such thing as honour. "Can honour set to a leg?" he asks. "No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery, then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word honour? What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. 'Tis insensible, then. Yea, to the dead But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it. Therefore I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon: and so ends my catechism."

Falstaff's creed, in other words, is the creed of the five senses. Beyond them he sees nothing in life and practises nothing in conduct. He is not only an out-and-out materialist but denies defiantly the existence of the moral law. Against it he levels all the batteries of his wit, but the moral law wins out in the end. In spite of the fascination which Falstaff exercises over those whom he meets, he fails utterly with Henry V as soon as responsibility has developed in the young monarch a real sense of honour. Their meeting is now the meeting of opposites and the result is inevitable. Henry V does not so much throw off Falstaff as rise beyond his reach. And yet Falstaff con-

tributes something worth while to morality as well as to humour. He looked on himself not only as witty, but as "the cause that wit is in other men." So he was, but he was more. "Humour," says Moulton, "is an essential for a censor of morals; no one is in a state to discuss literary morality unless he can lay his hand on his heart and vow that he loves Shakespeare's Falstaff."

6. We are not all Falstaffs or Don Quixotes, but we are all, at times, Hamlets. Indeed the character of Hamlet is far better understood to-day than when Shakespeare created it. It at least ought to be, for it has not lacked for students. The distinguishing thing about Hamlet is that he broke no moral law, violated none of the Ten Commandments, but yet vastly enlarged the area of wrongdoing. All the bloodshed in the play, except the original crime that precedes the rise of the curtain, is due to Hamlet — not to what he does but to what he does not do. Hamlet takes Hood's lines,

> Evil is wrought by want of thought
> As well as want of heart,

and makes them read,

> Evil is wrought by too much thought
> As well as want of heart.

And yet Hamlet is the most variously gifted man that Shakespeare has portrayed. He is eloquent in speech, profound in thought, a rare revealer of individuality in others, a man of virtue and integrity, "the glass of fashion and the mould of form." He sees so deeply into things and has such a gift of phrase that almost all of his utterances pass still as current coin in the marts of the world's thought. He is thirty years old, is fresh from the great Protestant University of Wittenberg, and eager to return.

But just here lies the special challenge of Hamlet's character: out of the two hundred and forty-six men and women that Shakespeare has created Hamlet is the only scholar, and at the same time the only character that brings about the final tragedy by inaction. Did the great dramatist mean nothing by this combination of scholarship and inefficiency? Did he not mean to say that he saw from the life about him that there was an education that did not educate, a culture that ministered to the reflective and emotional faculties but, leaving the will flaccid and impotent, rendered prompt action impossible? Dryden describes Hamlet when he makes one of the characters in *The Conquest of Grenada* say,

> I scarcely understand my own intent,
> But, silkworm-like, so long within have wrought
> That I am lost in my own web of thought.

Men of this type—and they are usually teachers, writers, bookmen, men of sedentary life — cannot do because they see so many possible ways of doing. It is easier to plan, to intend, to dream, because mere thinking requires no fitting of awkward tools: it is complete in itself. Action, however, is always incomplete, always a few steps behind the master, thought. We may say of Hamlet what Emerson said of Thoreau: "Wherever there is knowledge, wherever there is virtue, wherever there is beauty, he will find a home." But wherever there is the body of action as well as the wing of thought, wherever life is viewed not as a problem to be forever probed but as a duty to be instantly done, there will Hamlet be forever barred.

7. It used to be thought that *Hamlet* was intended only for mature minds, *Robinson Crusoe* only for immature. But both make their appeal to young and old alike, for both are revelations of life, and life is a continuous process. *Robinson Crusoe* was written by Daniel Defoe in 1719, and is now the most popular boy book in literature.

Coleridge once said that "the three most perfect plots ever planned" were the *Œdipus Tyrannus* by Sophocles, *The Alchemist* by Ben Jonson, and *Tom Jones* by Henry Fielding. In modern literature the three most suggestive situations seem to me *Robinson Crusoe*, *Faust*, and *The Leatherstocking Tales*. There is little or no plot in any of these. The interest is in the leading character, who is placed in a situation that appeals powerfully to our interest in human nature.

Robinson Crusoe is the story of a man who has to start life over again without the help of social institutions, civil institutions, educational institutions, industrial institutions, or institutions of any kind. He falls back and down through the centuries till he finds himself face to face with nature. He has to fight for bare existence. He is Adam without an Eve for a helpmeet or a garden ready made to his hand. Can a man live under these conditions? If so, what can he get out of life? Ulysses found himself for a short time in a similar plight, but he was aided by gods and goddesses. Robinson, it is true, saves a few things from the wreck, but not enough to alter the problem. He is still individualism battling without the aid of institutionalism. Rousseau was so

impressed by the educative qualities of *Robinson Crusoe* that he thought boys should read no other book till they were fourteen years of age. No one, he contended, could be a useful member of society or coöperate helpfully with others until by developing his own individuality he had learned to stand alone. Hence, "Émile" — he is Rousseau's model pupil — "exacts nothing from others and never thinks of owing anything to them. He is alone in human society and depends solely on himself."

Education, however, does not mean isolation. It does not mean self-development away from society. Education ought to make a man good company for himself, but it ought also to relate him to the best company anywhere. Huxley's ideal is the right one: "Since each child is a member of a social and political organization of great complexity, and has, in future, to fit himself into that organization or be crushed by it, it is needful not only that boys and girls should be made acquainted with the elementary laws of conduct, but that their affections should be trained so as to love with all their hearts that conduct which tends to the attainment of the highest good for themselves and their fellowmen, and to hate with all their hearts that opposite

course of action which is fraught with evil." Robinson had no opportunity to shape his conduct with regard to others. There were no others. But he remains none the less one of the great figures in the world's fiction. He is a constant reminder that we underrate what we can do for ourselves and overrate what others can do for us. Every chapter in *Robinson Crusoe* is and has been for nearly two hundred years a challenge to courage, to initiative, to self-reliance, to self-development — in a word, to constructive individualism. Many imitations of Defoe's book have been published, but not one of them has stated the problem so well or illustrated it so convincingly.

8. The situation in Goethe's *Faust* is entirely different except that in both books the two heroes are subjected to a long and severe testing and come out of it victoriously. Goethe's masterpiece marks not only the highest reach of its author's genius but the highest reach of modern thought about human nature. The situation, however, and the problem presented are simple enough for any child to understand. Faust is a scholar and investigator who cannot find satisfaction for his spirit. His ideals of happiness and attainment are far beyond what he has been able to achieve. At last he enters

into a contract with Satan. "Take me in charge," he says, "and tempt me with all the pleasures of mind and body at your disposal. If you can satisfy my innate desires, if you can make me say to any passing moment, 'Stay, thou art so fair,' then bind my soul in your bonds" Hamlet's testing, after receiving the message from the ghost, extended through two and a half months; Robinson Crusoe remained on his lonely island twenty-seven years; Faust journeys with Satan for fifty years. "The little world and then the great we'll see," Satan had said. During this time he enjoys every delight that his imagination craves — banquetings, revellings, woman's love, the revelations of magic, comradeship with nature, the achievements of intellect, and the witchery of all forms of beauty. But in every experience Faust is either disgusted or in the moment of enjoyment feels the call to something higher. He might well have said, as Tennyson makes Ulysses say:

> Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough
> Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades
> Forever and forever when I move.

But broadened and ennobled by his struggle Faust enters at last upon the joy of servi

others. Though blind and a hundred years old, the climbing mood is still dominant within him. Having obtained a bit of seashore, he redeems it from the waves and colonizes it with happy labourers. He had begun this work merely to exhibit the victory of mind over nature. But as it progresses he is conscious of a happiness unknown before. His spirit glows at the thought of the good that he is doing and of the millions who in after ages will labour fruitfully and gratefully on the land that he has rescued. He has passed from the ideal of Longfellow's *Excelsior* to the ideal of Lanier's *Song of the Chattahoochee.* If he could only look down the ages and see this free people on a free soil, he would be willing to say to the moment, "Stay, thou art so fair." But the time will come

> And in sure prospect of such lofty bliss,
> I now enjoy the highest moment — *this!*

He falls dead, Satan orders his minions to seize the ascending soul, but the angels bear it aloft singing:

> The noble spirit now is free
> And saved from evil scheming.
> Whoe'er aspires unweariedly
> Is not beyond redeeming.

> And if he feels the grace of love
> That from on high is given,
> The blessed hosts that wait above
> Shall welcome him to heaven.

"In these lines," said Goethe, "the key to Faust's rescue may be found — in Faust himself an ever higher and purer form of activity to the end, and the eternal love coming down to his aid from above. This is entirely in harmony with our religious ideas, according to which we are saved not by our own strength alone but by and through the freely bestowed grace of God."

In the old Faust legends the compact was that Faust should have whatever he desired for twenty years and then surrender body and soul to Satan. What a wealth of spiritual truth and stimulating idealism Goethe has poured into the old mould of the fable! There was no invisible goal in the old legend. The reader or spectator knew in advance what was coming. He had only to wait in shuddering awe till at the end of twenty years the Devil claimed his own. But in Goethe's hands the story becomes a new gospel. Mankind is Faust. Satan is a spirit that "always wills the bad and always works the good." What an illuminating thought that is! Many solutions

of the problem were possible. Faust might have said "Stay" (1) to some moment of physical pleasure, (2) to some moment of intellectual achievement, (3) to some moment of artistic enjoyment, or (4) to some moment of victory for others. He said "Stay" to none of these. His ideal was still in the ascendant. He said "Stay" not to a present moment but to a moment of unselfish achievement yet to be. Tennyson attempted to characterize Goethe's work in these lines:

> I held it truth, with him who sings
> To one clear harp in divers tones,
> That men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things.

A better summary would be:

> Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,
> Or what's a heaven for?

9. Faust is the best known character that German literature has produced, and Leatherstocking is the best known character that American literature has produced.* Both are types, the one of life

* American literature has produced only a few characters well known beyond our own borders. The best known seem to me Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle, Cooper's Leatherstocking, Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom, Harris's Uncle Remus, and Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard is more a piece of practical advice than a bit of human nature.

in its universal aspects, the other of life in its elemental aspects. If Faust found his highest pleasure in making a "clearing" for coming generations to colonize, it is well to remember that this was Leatherstocking's life work. If Faust stands more distinctively for the spirit of idealism that has made Germany what it is, Leatherstocking stands for the pioneer spirit, and the pioneer spirit has done more than anything else to make our country what it is. Cooper used to say: "If anything from the pen of the author is at all to outlive himself, it is unquestionably the series of *The Leatherstocking Tales.*" He called these stories — *The Deerslayer*, *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Pathfinder*, *The Pioneers*, and *The Prairie* — "a drama in five acts." And so they are — the greatest drama that America has to show. They dramatize the westward movement of American civilization and cover the years from 1743 to 1804. These sixty years were the romantic period of American history, and Cooper has made them a part of the inspirational heritage not only of the American people but of all civilized people. "He has earned a fame wider, I think," said William Cullen Bryant, "than any author of modern times; certainly than any author of any age ever enjoye

in his lifetime." Time has confirmed this judgment. There is now no geographical frontier on our map and therefore no leatherstockinged pioneer. The geographical frontier ceased to be in 1890. But there were never so many frontiers of thought or of national effort. A geographical meridian has become an intellectual meridian and Cooper's pioneer has become the type of those elemental qualities that give distinctive promise to American history.

All this is summed up in the single character of Leatherstocking. "I am not sure," said Balzac, "if the entire work of Walter Scott furnishes a creation as noble [grandiose] as this hero of the plains and forests." Thackeray was of the same opinion. Compare Leatherstocking with other characters standing on national horizons. If the Greeks had followed up the actual trail of Ulysses and colonized in his wake, he would be to Greek history what Leatherstocking is to our history. If England had moved over to Trinidad and built upon Robinson Crusoe's foundations, he would have been the English prototype of Leatherstocking. If Robin Hood had been less of a buccaneer and had not owed his popularity (as Dowden reminds us) to the fact that he was "the reputed

Earl of Huntingdon," he would bear democratic comparison with Leatherstocking. If Scott's border-chieftains had seen life through a somewhat wider angle, if they had looked upon border-lines as something more than petty battle-lines of inherited enmities, they too would have been predecessors of Leatherstocking. But Scott's border-line points backward, Cooper's forward. The significance of Leatherstocking will increase in exact proportion as America increases. He reproduces the past, but he belongs to the future.

10. Leatherstocking can be identified in part at least with Daniel Boone. Our next character, Browning's Pippa, is a pure product of the imagination. "Mr. Browning," says Mrs. Orr, "was walking alone in a wood near Dulwich, when the image flashed upon him of some one walking thus alone through life, one apparently too obscure to leave a trace of his or her passage, yet exercising a lasting though unconscious influence at every step of it; and the image shaped itself into the little silk-winder of Asolo, Felippa or Pippa." This is the motive, the unconscious influence of good over evil, that gives unity to *Pippa Passes*, but Pippa herself is more, far more, than the embodiment of this one idea.

It is New Year's day and Pippa springing out of bed determines to spend her one holiday in the year singing through the streets, as if she were in turn "the happiest four in our Asolo." But these happiest four are, at the moment Pippa passes, the four most miserable or perplexed in Asolo. Her four joyous songs, sung at morning, noon, evening, and night, find "the happiest four" at the critical moment of their lives — find them and save them. This is the framework of a little drama as perfect in its symmetry as it is beautiful in its unfolding. Notice, if you have not, that in every case Pippa's songs are not merely external influences. They blend with the better nature, already half awakened, of the person that hears them. They are not causative but coöperative. They are like the ghosts and dreams in Shakespeare: they do not compel action, they only help it to crystallize. No one can read this poem without realizing more deeply the radiating and transforming power of mere joyousness. Joy like Pippa's is as good as goodness and more contagious. No one can read it without realizing, too, the influence in his life — in all life — of certain significant, tidal, malleable moments. In these moments the thoughts and feelings and tendencies

of years seem suddenly to mature. The best introduction to *Pippa Passes* is found in Emerson's *Over-Soul:* "There is a vast difference between one and another hour of life in their authority and subsequent effect. Our faith comes in moments; our vice is habitual. Yet there is a depth in those brief moments which constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences. For this reason the argument which is always forthcoming to silence those who conceive extraordinary hopes of man, namely, the appeal to experience, is forever invalid and vain. A mightier hope abolishes despair. We give up the past to the objector, and yet we hope. He must explain this hope." *Pippa Passes* is the dramatization of the tidal moment, and Pippa is the little alchemist who transmutes the metal of the moment into gold.

11. Pippa is the least complex and Becky Sharp the most complex character that we have to consider. Indeed Thackeray intended *Vanity Fair* as a protest against the novels, and Becky Sharp as a protest against the heroines, that could be conventionally classed. To know her is not to understand her, but it is to understand phases of society that had never before been so subtly probed.

"*Vanity Fair*," said Lord Rosebery recently, "is the most full and various novel in the English language," and Becky Sharp gives it both its fulness and its variety. You do not know what she is going to do next, and Thackeray confessed that he did not know what she had already done. But you do know that she is a touchstone by which the other characters of *Vanity Fair* are tested. With all her duplicity she is the best mirror that Thackeray ever held up to English society. If the modern novel, as Walter Besant said, is "the only way in which people can learn what other men and women are like," the world owes a debt to *Vanity Fair* and to its unheroic heroine, Becky Sharp. The proportion and completeness of her portrayal were a revelation in 1848 and are a revelation still. "What I want," wrote Thackeray to his mother, "is to make a set of people living without God in the world (only that is a cant phrase), greedy, pompous men, perfectly self-satisfied for the most part, and at ease about their superior virtue." Near the beginning of the story he writes: "And this I set down as a positive truth: a woman with fair opportunities, and without an absolute hump, may marry whom she likes." On Becky Sharp falls

the responsibility of illustrating this questionable foreword.

False, selfish, cunning, and covetous but always successful, Becky Sharp plays her rôle consistently to the end. "There are women," says Trollope, "to whom nothing is nasty, either in person, language, scenes, actions, or principle, and Becky is one of them; and yet she is herself attractive. A most wonderful sketch, for the perpetration of which all Thackeray's power of combined indignation and humour was necessary." But it was not indignation and humour that made Becky Sharp. It was rather the revolt from the sentimental fiction of the day. It was the determination to paint life as it occasionally was and is rather than as it might be or ought to be. Thackeray's sympathy was not with but for this unheroic heroine. Taine was right in calling him above all a moralist. He does not confuse good and bad in man or woman. There is a large tolerance for all, and for none more than for Becky Sharp. The best explanation of our interest in her is not that given by Trollope. It is given by Browning in *Bishop Blougram's Apology:*

> You see lads walk the street
> Sixty the minute; what's to note in that?
> You see one lad o'erstride a chimney-stack;

Him you must watch — he's sure to fall, yet stands!
Our interest's on the dangerous edge of things,
The honest thief, the tender murderer,
The superstitious atheist, demirep
That loves and saves her soul in new French books —
We watch while these in equilibrium keep
The giddy line midway: one step aside,
They're classed and done with.

Becky Sharp and all of her kind keep

> The giddy line midway: one step aside,
> They're classed and done with.

12. *Vanity Fair*, *David Copperfield*, and *Silas Marner* are all historical novels in the new sense of the term. They do not introduce great historical characters, but they are transcripts of English life at definite periods and in definite places. The historians of the future may well turn to them for local colour, for accurate details, and for a knowledge of how the men and women of the time really lived. But *David Copperfield* has an added interest: it is in part an autobiography. In an after-dinner speech Dickens once made an affecting plea for four kinds of children: "the dear child you love, the dearer child you have lost, the child you might have had, the child you certainly have been." *David Copperfield* is the story

of the child that Charles Dickens certainly had been. Thackeray could never be prevailed upon to say which of his own characters was his favorite, but Dickens had his answer ready: "It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent of every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favorite child, and his name is David Copperfield." When he was within three pages of the end, he wrote to John Forster, his future biographer: "Oh, my dear Forster, if I were to say half of what *Copperfield* makes me feel to-night, how strangely even to you I should be turned inside out! I seem to be sending some part of myself into the Shadowy World."

But David Copperfield is more than Charles Dickens. He is every normal boy and youth. The warm mother-love, the quaint old servant, the solitude of childhood, the significance of joyousness in child life, the incisiveness of youthful sorrows, the susceptibility to hero-worship, the readiness for impulsive attachments, the ambition to be a man and to do a man's work, the memory of the first applause — these things belong not only to the autobiography of Dickens

but to the biography of universal childhood. The autobiographical facts are only the materials for larger interpretative treatment. "It is to the wisdom of that running comment which Dickens makes upon them," says Peter Bayne, "that they owe their best value."

As an I-novel *David Copperfield* has often been classed with *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*. But the last two are not novels proper. They are stories, moreover, of manhood. David Copperfield begins: "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike and I began to cry, simultaneously." It ends: "My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night, but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company. Oh, Agnes, Oh, my soul! so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!" *David Copperfield*, in other

words, is the only I-novel that begins with infancy, carries you without serious break to early manhood, impresses you on every page with a sense of unmistakable reality, and makes you feel that you are reading your own life in its normal and essential emotions. It is the great I-novel in which "I" stands for the universal element in every reader.

13. Some literary statistician has figured out that *David Copperfield* contains 340,000 words, *Silas Marner* 75,000. A first reading of the two books would leave the impression that the difference in length was even greater. *Silas Marner* is a tale or extended short story rather than a novel, its symmetry and unity of structure making it appear even shorter than it is. Unity of structure, however, and even sameness of theme, are characteristic of all George Eliot's novels. The theme that she prefers to treat has been well phrased by Sidney Lanier. It is "that of a hungering life, at first balked by adverse circumstances, wasting itself on something unworthy — often from pure ignorance as to where anything nobler is to be found — but after struggling, finally finding better and larger life and love." This outline fits perfectly the story of *Silas Marner*, but George Eliot

has expressed her purpose in the story still more concisely: she intended it to emphasize "the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations," and she placed upon the title-page these lines from Wordsworth:

> A child, more than all other gifts
> That earth can offer to declining man,
> Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts.

For fifteen years Silas Marner, the weaver of Raveloe, worshipped the gold coins that he had painfully amassed. For fifteen years he had been growing less and less human and more and more miserly and money-mad. People meant nothing to him. His all was the gold heap in the hole underneath the brick floor, by the side of his loom. Then came the robbery. "He put his trembling hands to his head and gave a wild ringing scream." The hole was empty. New Year's Eve came and "Turning toward the hearth, where the two logs had fallen apart, and sent forth only a red uncertain glimmer, Silas seated himself on his fireside chair, and was stooping to push his logs together, when, to his blurred vision, it seemed as if there were gold in the floor in front of the hearth. Gold! — his

own gold — brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away! He felt his heart begin to beat violently, and for a few moments he was unable to stretch out his hands and grasp the restored treasure. The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. He leaned forward at last, and stretched forth his hand; but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls. In utter amazement, Silas fell on his knees and bent his head low to examine the marvel: it was a sleeping child — a round, fair thing, with soft yellow rings all over its head."

Now begins the slow but steady restoration of Silas to the normal life. His spirit, "dried up and closely furled," began to feel "the freshness of the early world." A little "golden head" had taken the place of gold. "The gold had kept his thoughts in an ever-repeated circle, leading to nothing beyond itself; but Eppie was an object compacted of changes and hopes that forced his thoughts onward, and carried them far away from their old eager pacing toward the same blank limit." George Eliot's final summary joins the story with those eternal processes of redemption that pass daily and unheeded before us, but less

unheeded now that Silas and Eppie have become a part of them: "In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently toward a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's."

14. *Silas Marner* is the story of a man who was saved by substituting the humanizing love of a little girl for the dehumanizing love of gold. In much the same way two outcasts of Parisian society, Fantine and Cosette, help on the reformation of Jean Valjean. "A little child shall lead them" might be a subtitle for both books. In both books, too, it is the opportunity to minister, not to be ministered to, that makes the change. But *Les Misérables* is a vaster book than *Silas Marner*, and Jean Valjean a vaster character than the weaver of Raveloe. Never till *Les Misérables* appeared, in 1862, had the submerged classes found so powerful a representation in literature, and never had their oppressors been so pilloried. Their oppressors, thinks Hugo, are

not so much men as men-administered institutions. It is these that perpetuate ignorance and misery, and "So long as ignorance and misery remain upon the earth, so long," says Hugo, "will books of this kind be demanded." In another eloquent passage he exclaims: "Destroy the cave, Ignorance, and you destroy the mole, Crime. . . . The sole social evil is darkness; humanity is one, for all men are of the same clay, and in this nether world at least there is no difference in predestination; we are the same shadow before, the same flesh during, and the same ashes afterward. But ignorance, mixed with the human paste, blackens it, and this incurable blackness enters man and becomes Evil there."

Jean Valjean, the hero, receives the *maximum* penalty for the *minimum* offence. He had stolen a loaf of bread to give his starving sister and her seven children. He received five years in the galleys for robbery, and fourteen more for trying to escape. He comes out of the galleys a hardened criminal, aged forty-six. "It is sad to say that after trying society, which had caused his misfortunes, he tried Providence, which had made society, and condemned it also." He receives his first kindness from a good Bishop,

whom he requites by stealing his silver plate. When an officer hales him before the Bishop, the Bishop speaks first: "Ah! there you are. I am glad to see you; but I gave you the candlesticks, too, which are also silver and will bring you two hundred francs. Why did you not take them away with the rest of the plate?" When the officer had gone, the Bishop turned again to Jean Valjean: "My brother, you no longer belong to evil but to good. I have bought your soul of you. I withdraw it from black thoughts and the spirit of perdition, and give it to God."

Jean Valjean is stunned, but the better nature has been reached. Still, in a strange fit of absent-mindedness, he takes two francs from a child and then, overtaken by remorse, tries to find the little fellow and restore his money. Years afterward, when under a different name Jean Valjean has become rich and honoured, he hears that another is to be sent to the galleys for his own theft of the two-franc piece. A terrible mental struggle follows. This struggle, not the Battle of Waterloo, is the master description in the book. He reaches the place of trial just in time to have an innocent man acquitted and himself condemned to the galleys for life. After rescuing a sailor

from drowning, Jean Valjean again escapes, but he is a hunted man for the rest of his life. From his hiding places, however, he is a ministering angel to Cosette. This little outcast had been committed to him by her mother, Fantine, into whose life he had brought the only sunlight that ever penetrated there. Only at the last does he receive some measure of the love that he had poured out to others. "I know not what is the matter with me," he said just before death, "*but I see light.*"

The publication of *Les Misérables* was an event in the history of social reform. It is an unequalled and unanswered indictment of the then existing social order. It is not constructive, except in that high sense in which all works are constructive that discipline the faculties of moral indignation and purify and enlarge the sympathies. In the outcasts of earth, in the disinherited and condemned, in the lowest dregs of society, men have since learned to see possible Jean Valjeans. "Is there not," asks the author, "in every human soul, was there not in that of Jean Valjean especially, a primary spark, a divine element, incorruptible in this world, and immortal for the other, which good can develop, illumine, and cause to gleam

splendidly, and which evil can never entirely extinguish?" To ask this question is not to answer it, but, after *Les Misérables*, it is to see new possibilities in human nature, to hold all law and custom to a juster account, and to think thoughts that in themselves are not far from deeds.

15. Two qualities stand out supreme in Hugo's masterpiece: flaming indignation and tender sympathy. In *Uncle Remus: His Songs and his Sayings*, there is only sympathy, but it is a sympathy so sure in its insight, so wide in its range, so wise in its expression, that it has enabled the author to typify a race, and thus to perpetuate a civilization. What Cooper did for the Indian, Joel Chandler Harris has done for the negro. Just as Chingachgook is the last of the Mohicans, so Uncle Remus is the last of the old-time negroes. In literature he is also the first. These stories, moreover, reproduce a dialect so accurately that it may now be studied like any other form of primitive English. They brought also the folk-tales of a race into literature, and thus laid the foundation for the scientific study of negro folk-lore. Uncle Remus himself, however, is more interesting than his stories.

Twenty-eight years before the appearance of

Uncle Remus, Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe had sent the name of Uncle Tom around the world. But Uncle Tom is not distinctively a negro. He is the type of a good man subjected to inhuman treatment, but there is no African background in his speech, character, or demeanour. Nor is the negro of the comic minstrel show, the negro of Stephen Collins Foster, a real interpretation. As deservedly popular as Foster's songs are, their distinguishing trait — over and above the haunting melody — is a vague sentimentality. But the old-time negro was not sentimental. He was religious, musical, humorous, loyal, emotional, quaint, indirect, sociable, improvident, diplomatic, philosophical — almost everything in fact except sentimental. Harris's portrayal, therefore, marked a reaction rather than a continuation. He summarized a race in the character of an individual. Uncle Remus has also a deeper significance, a significance that will become clearer the more the character is studied: in the knowledge of negro life, and in the sympathy with negro character shown in the portrayal of Uncle Remus, there is suggested a better method for the solution of the so-called negro problem than can be found in all the political platforms and merely

legal enactments that American statesmanship has yet devised. Jean Valjean represents a class, Uncle Remus a race. The creators of both teach that the understanding that comes through sympathy must precede the knowledge that seeks its ends through legislation.

Let us attempt now to relate these characters as a whole to the problem of learning "what other men and women are like." It is at least evident that from Homer to the present time interest in other men and women has been an absorbing interest. Is it not evident also that a study of human nature as the masters have portrayed it is a means of widening and deepening our knowledge of human nature? Let us see.

One reason why human nature is a sealed book to so many is that their range of character-interests is too limited. You cannot measure a man's knowledge of animals by the number of animals that he has seen, but by the number that he has seen and is interested in. We learn not by contact, but by contact *plus* interest. A man may spend his life among trees and not know the names or natures of a half-dozen of them. But if you can increase his range of tree-interests you increase

permanently his tree-knowledge, or at least put him in the way of increasing it for himself. It is so with our knowledge of our fellow-men. We shut ourselves up to a few types and are blind to the others, or measure the others solely by these types. We have never realized the greatness, the variety, or the possibilities of human nature. Our lens is too contracted. What is needed is to multiply our human-nature interests. Will not great fiction do this for us? Is it possible to look at human nature through the eyes of the great character-creators and then see no more in the life about us than we saw before?

But great fiction not only broadens our range of character-interests, it directs our attention to the essentials of character. As complex as human nature is, the central factors are not many. Love, growth, honour, sympathy, idealism, faith, fortitude, truth, tolerance, coöperation — these are the fundamentals, and it is on these or their opposites that the masters put the stress. Sometimes they take only one great trait and build the character on or around this, though usually they take more. But whether one or more, it is the essentials with which they deal. Men do not differ from one another so much in the possession

of different qualities as in the relative accent that they put upon the qualities that they have in common. Goethe said that he never read of a criminal without feeling that he might have been that criminal. The same latencies were there, but in Goethe these qualities were differently arranged and differently stressed. Individuality is in accent, not in spelling; and the study of great fiction is the study not of character-spelling but of character-accent. Our fifteen characters are as different as fifteen characters could well be, but each one of them is a study in essentials. A few qualities give the key, and the result is a revelation. To see how needful this lesson of the essentials is, ask the average man to analyze and interpret the character of some one whom you both know. See if he does not talk all around the character, giving age, dress, colour of hair and eyes, and ending with some vague generality as impersonal as air.

But great fiction not only presents character in its variety and vitality, but presents it more completely than we can see it in the men and women about us. Compare a biography with a good novel of equal size. The biographer states facts and dates, tells the things that were known about the man, arranges them in chrono-

logical order, perhaps makes wise comments upon them. But he is working from the outside. The central springs of motive and action are never near the surface. The man's life, moreover, was not planned to lay bare his inmost soul, and the biography follows far behind the life. But in the case of fictive characters the biography *is* the life. The story is all. The character may have been sketched in part from one or more characters in real life, but when it is put upon the printed page, it must bear its credentials with it. It must be a creation that validates itself, an interpretation that interprets itself. Achievements in character-creation may be complex, may be hard to decipher, but there is no place for fragmentariness. There must be oneness and wholeness or there is no life. With all the obscurity that Thackeray loved to throw about Becky Sharp, we know her better than we know any historical character of her time and better than her own lovers knew her. She cannot lie to us. We know her unspoken thoughts. We know not only what others said of her to her back, but what they thought of her in secret. We can, in fact, never know men and women in real life as we know them in fiction, because in real life their Creator does not visibly direct

their actions toward a preordained end or by a preordained chart. But to know even a few of the great characters of fiction gives a direction and wholeness to our observation of real life that we can get nowhere else. There are no perfect circles in nature; but to see a perfect circle, though a made one, is necessary to the accurate observation of an imperfect one. We must presuppose completeness before we can measure incompleteness.

Is it necessary now to answer the old question: Why study human nature in books when you can study it in the flesh? Why waste time on paper folks when there are real folks all about you? This chapter has been written to no purpose if this question has not been already answered. The study of human nature in books is solely to the end that it may be better studied in life. A mere book-knowledge of men and women will avail little — may be permanently narrowing — unless it is used as a means of seeing more in and more deeply into the life about us and within us. Great fiction is a laboratory course in human nature. It is to real life what botany is to flowers, what astronomy is to stars, what the world of the microscope and telescope is to the world of the

naked eye. It is not a substitute for real life, but an introduction to real life.

We hear much to-day about "a shrewd knowledge of human nature." The phrase means, when men brag about it, not a knowledge of human nature at all, but only a "shrewd" way of dealing with human nature. Literature will not give this, but it will give a knowledge of human nature that partakes more of wisdom than of shrewdness. It will give you freedom and enrichment. You will laugh with the great laughers, love with the great lovers, dream with the great dreamers, see with the great seers, and do with the great doers.

CHAPTER IV

It Can Restore the Past to You

WHEN literature holds before us the vision of the ideal, it points us to the future; when it gives us a more sympathetic insight into the men and women with whom our lot is cast, it points us to the present; when it restores to us the men and events long since vanished, it points us to the past. Literature, then, anticipates the future, interprets the present, and recalls the past. It has three tenses, because human nature has three tenses. Each tense is an outlet.

No power of the poet gives me a greater feeling of awe than that by which he says to oblivion: "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed." The enemies that man has fought most persistently from the beginning are death and oblivion. He fights death with science; he fights oblivion, most successfully, with literature. The historian may

galvanize the past, but the poet vitalizes it. The great deeds of the heroic dead are preserved in annals and chronicles, but they live in song and story. Enshrine history in literature and you give it both currency and permanency. We often speak of "the irrevocable past," but to literature there is no irrevocable past. Literature can not only recall the past, but can make of it an ever-living present.

On September 15, 1833, there died in Vienna, at the age of twenty-two, one of the most promising young Englishmen of his century. That, at least, was the opinion of Tennyson, of Gladstone, of Lord Houghton, of Sir Francis Hastings Doyle, of every one in fact who knew him and wrote of him. His name was Arthur Henry Hallam. His father, Henry Hallam, a distinguished historian, erected a handsome tablet to his son, had a marble bust of him made, and published at once his *Remains in Prose and Verse* with an affectionate memoir. The latter is peculiarly pathetic. There runs through it the thought that his son was cut down before he had a chance to make a name for himself, but that he would have made a name for himself, a great name, with the coming years. This thought is expressed on the marble tablet:

"And now in this obscure and solitary Church
repose the mortal remains of
one too early lost for public fame
but already conspicuous among his contemporaries
for the brightness of his genius,
the depth of his understanding,
the nobleness of his disposition,
the fervour of his piety
and the purity of his life."

Note the words, "too early lost for public fame." It seemed so, though wealth and affection had done all they could do. Literature, however, had not spoken. But in the year 1850, a great poet, Alfred Tennyson, published a great poem, *In Memoriam*, the theme of which is Tennyson's friendship for Hallam. And to-day Arthur Henry Hallam is known wherever English literature is studied. His "public fame" already far surpasses that of his father, though the historian lived to the age of eighty-two and was honoured by a statue in St. Paul's Cathedral. The readers who know of the historian because he was the father of his son are already more in number than those who know of Arthur Henry Hallam merely because he was the son of his father. And this number will increase, for the name of Arthur Henry Hallam is linked forever with a poem

that is one of the world's most beautiful tributes to friendship. It is more than this. "*In Memoriam*," said Tennyson, "is rather the cry of the whole human race than mine. In the poem altogether private grief swells out into thought of, and hope for, the whole world. It begins with a funeral and ends with a marriage — a sort of *Divine Comedy*, cheerful at the close." *In Memoriam* is a ladder reaching from abject despair to triumphant hope, and the spirit of Hallam, like Beatrice of old, is our guide and comrade on its ascending rounds.

Could a painting, a monument, a statue, a memorial building have rescued Hallam as successfully from oblivion as this poem has done? Could they have given him so secure a position in the thoughts and affections of those who never saw him? Could they have reached or helped as many people? Great memorials have to be visited, they will not come to you as a poem does. You may see pictures of them, but the picture is a mere copy, and a copy of a work of art is a poor thing except a copy of a great writing. The copy of this is as good as the original — contains, in fact, all of the original that was meant to be seen. Take

the case of Helen Fourment. She was the second wife of the great portrait painter, Rubens. He painted her portrait so frequently that a recent biographer says: "We know her charms as we know the charms of no other woman that ever lived in all the eons of time." It is not a question here of copies, for these portraits of Helen Fourment are all originals. But which has the more successfully defied time, the poet or the painter? Who is the more truly alive, Arthur Hallam or Helen Fourment?

Let us take another character, as different from Arthur Henry Hallam as could well be imagined. Isaac Newton Giffen was the son of a blacksmith in the mountains of east Tennessee. He was a lean, homely, freckle-faced little fellow who could neither read nor write. In one of the battles of the Civil War — for he was a soldier — young Giffen was desperately wounded but was tenderly nursed by Dr. and Mrs. Francis O. Ticknor, of Torch Hill, Georgia. "His part in eighteen battles," says Doctor Ticknor's granddaughter, "and freedom from injury except in the last, the story of his march, wounded and ill, how he and others would lie down in the road to drink the water from mud-puddles, and other events of his war

career, were sources of untiring entertainment to the children, and by amusing them he was a great help to Mrs. Ticknor. Giffen came to Torch Hill in September, 1863, and left in March, 1864. On the day of his departure he and Douglas Ticknor started from Torch Hill to Columbus, riding an old gray army horse; at Bull Creek the water was unusually high and the horse lost the road, fell into a washout, and both boys were thrown. Douglas and the horse came ashore on the Torch Hill side, while the current carried Giffen across the creek. From there he waved his last good-bye, and climbed wet and muddy into the wagon of a negro going to town. Nothing further was ever heard of him, and there is no doubt that he met death in some immediate encounter." Nothing here for painter or sculptor. But Doctor Ticknor was a poet, and in 1867 these lines appeared:

LITTLE GIFFEN

Out of the focal and foremost fire,
Out of the hospital walls as dire,
Smitten of grape-shot and gangrene,
(Eighteenth battle, and he sixteen!)
Spectre! such as you seldom see,
Little Giffen, of Tennessee!

"Take him and welcome!" the surgeon said:
"Little the doctor can help the dead!"
So we took him, and brought him where
The balm was sweet in the summer air;
And we laid him down on a wholesome bed —
Utter Lazarus, heel to head!

And we watched the war with abated breath,
Skeleton boy against skeleton death.
Months of torture, how many such?
Weary weeks of the stick and crutch;
And still a glint of the steel-blue eye
Told of a spirit that wouldn't die.

And didn't. Nay, more! in death's despite
The crippled skeleton learned to write.
"Dear Mother," at first, of course; and then
"Dear Captain," inquiring about the men.
Captain's answer: "Of eighty and five,
Giffen and I are left alive."

Word of gloom from the war, one day;
Johnston pressed at the front, they say.
Little Giffen was up and away;
A tear — his first — as he bade good-bye,
Dimmed the glint of his steel-blue eye.
"I'll write, if spared!" There was news of the fight;
But none of Giffen. He did not write.

I sometimes fancy that were I king
Of the princely knights of the Golden Ring,*

* Why is this reference to King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table peculiarly appropriate in the case of Little Giffen? See page 80.

With the song of the minstrel in mine ear,
And the tender legend that trembles here,
I'd give the best on his bended knee,
The whitest soul of my chivalry,
For Little Giffen, of Tennessee.

Over these lines, as over a bridge stretching from death to life, Little Giffen has come back to dwell among men. Has he not lived a larger life since 1867 than he lived before? Thousands know him now where one knew him before. He has not lost his individuality, but he has become a symbol, not of partisanship but of loyalty — fearless, unswerving, death-defying loyalty.

Literature is full of triumphs of this sort. Read Milton's *Lycidas*, William Douglas's *Annie Laurie*, Burns's *To Mary in Heaven*, Charles Lamb's *Hester*, Wordsworth's *Lucy Gray*, Walter Savage Landor's *Rose Aylmer*, John Hay's *Jim Bludso of the Prairie Belle*. Each of these poems, brief as it is, has rescued a name from oblivion by attaching it to a thought or mood or emotion common to us all. None of the persons thus celebrated would have been mentioned by the historian, because, though real, they were not historical. They affected in no way the course of history in their respective countries or centuries,

and thus did not come within the province of the historian. In most cases, however, the characters that literature revitalizes are those that have an historical interest. We already know something of them, but not enough to bring them vividly before us. We know them by name perhaps but not by heart. In such cases the poet and the historical novelist supplement the work of the historian. They restore to us, however, not only men and women but historical events, historical periods, and even whole races that have vanished or are vanishing.

Few persons realize how much of our knowledge of the past is due to literature rather than to history proper. Boys thrill to-day over a battle fought between the French and the Austrians in a far-off village in Bavaria not because the historians have rescued it, but because Thomas Campbell wrote *The Battle of Hohenlinden.* Over a chasm of more than eighteen centuries we applaud the heroism of a heathen queen not because annals and chronicles have brought her to us, but because Cowper made an appeal for her in his *Boadicea.* We know and love Scotch history not because we have gone to Burton's or Mackintosh's learned volumes, but because the history of Scotland has

come to us in the prose and poetry of Walter Scott and Robert Burns. Men talk familiarly to-day of D'Artagnan, Louis XIII, Richelieu, Anne of Austria, and Mazarin, not because they have studied French history, but because in *The Three Musketeers*, *Twenty Years After*, and *The Vicomte de Bragelonne* Alexander Dumas has made this period of French history more familiar than any other unless it be the period of the French Revolution. If the French Revolution is better known it is because Dumas and Victor Hugo and a host of others have found their material in it.

Who that has once read it can ever forget the passage in *Les Misérables* beginning, "One half light, one half shade, Napoleon felt himself protected in good and tolerated in evil"? Or this comment on the Battle of Waterloo? "Was it possible for Napoleon to win the battle? We answer in the negative. Why? On account of Wellington, on account of Blücher? No; on account of God. Bonaparte, victor at Waterloo, did not harmonize with the law of the nineteenth century. Another series of facts was preparing, in which Napoleon had no longer a place: the ill-will of events had been displayed long previously. It was time for this vast man to fall; his excessive

weight in human destiny disturbed the balance. This individual alone was of more account than the universal group: such plethoras of human vitality concentrated in a single head — the world, mounting to one man's brain — would be mortal to civilization if they endured. The moment had arrived for the incorruptible supreme equity to reflect, and it is probable that the principles and elements on which the regular gravitations of the moral order as of the material order depend, complained. Streaming blood, overcrowded graveyards, mothers in tears, are formidable pleaders. When the earth is suffering from an excessive burden, there are mysterious groans from the shadow, which the abyss hears. Napoleon had been denounced in infinitude, and his fall was decided. Waterloo is not a battle, but a transformation of the universe."

The Duke of Marlborough spoke for more than himself when he said: "All the English history that I know, I learned from Shakespeare." James Russell Lowell expressed more than his own opinion when he pronounced Hawthorne's *House of the Seven Gables* "the most valuable contribution to New England history that has yet been made." Ralph Waldo Emerson did more

in one poem to make the Concord Fight known at home and abroad than any historian had done. Nothing better was ever said or sung about the Revolutionary War than the first stanza of the *Concord Hymn*, sung at the completion of the Battle Monument on April 19, 1836:

By the rude bridge that arched the flood,
Their flag to April's breeze unfurled,
Here once the embattled farmers stood
And fired the shot heard round the world.

The foe long since in silence slept;
Alike the conqueror silent sleeps;
And Time the ruined bridge has swept
Down the dark stream which seaward creeps.

On this green bank, by this soft stream,
We set to-day a votive stone;
That memory may their deed redeem,
When, like our sires, our sons are gone.

Spirit, that made those heroes dare
To die, and leave their children free,
Bid Time and Nature gently spare
The shaft we raise to them and thee.

We have always doubted, however, whether the shot was really "heard round the world" till Emerson wrote his poem.* The carrying power

*"To us at Oxford Emerson was but a voice speaking from three thousand miles away. But so well he spoke that from that time forth Boston Bay and Concord were names invested to my ear with a sentiment akin to that

of a noble deed is to be measured not solely by the nobleness of the deed, but by the nobleness of the deed *plus* the nobleness of the form in which the deed is expressed. Wordsworth recalls a great truth when he asks:

> And what for this frail world were all
> That mortals do or suffer,
> Did no responsive harp, no pen,
> Memorial tribute offer?

Those who heard the *Concord Hymn* sung must have felt that the deed had never before been so worthily expressed, for the first stanza was forthwith engraved on the very monument at whose completion the hymn was sung.

But Longfellow outranks them all in restoring our American past to us. Just when the critics had made up their minds that the day of the long poem was over, Longfellow wrote *Evangeline*, *The Song of Hiawatha*, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, and followed them with *Paul Revere's Ride*. These poems alone prove his right to be called our best historian in verse. He succeeded in making not only characters but events, periods, and

which invests for me the names of Oxford and Weimar; and snatches of Emerson's strain fixed themselves in my mind as imperishably as any of the eloquent words which I have been just now quoting." — Matthew Arnold, *Discourses in America*.

peoples live again. There are Acadian children in Louisiana, descendants of the people about whom Longfellow wrote, who know *Evangeline* by heart before they reach their teens. The poem is to the Acadians what the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were to the ancient Greeks. Its interest, however, is confined to no state or country. It was the first successful long poem in our literature that dealt with an event in our own history. "Eureka!" cried Whittier when he first read it. "Here, then, we have it at last — an American poem, with the lack of which British reviewers have so long reproached us." Thirty years after its appearance in 1847 it had been translated into German, Dutch, Swedish, Danish, French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Polish, and Bohemian.

Hiawatha was even more popular at home and abroad. The best comment on it was made by two Ojibway chiefs who in the year 1900 invited Longfellow's family to witness an Indian reproduction of *Hiawatha* on a rocky little island in Lake Huron: "We loved your father. The memory of our people will never die as long as your father's song lives, and that will live forever." Of *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, a description of the early days of the Plymouth Colony in

Massachusetts, ten thousand copies were sold in London on the first day of publication. The poem became at once an American classic, but, as its narrative is confined to New England, it has not carried our history into as many foreign lands as did *Evangeline* and *Hiawatha.*

Paul Revere's Ride leaped at once to a popularity that is still unequalled by any other narrative poem of the Revolutionary War. It was written in 1860, and the last six lines, prophesying the patriotic service of Paul Revere "through all our history, to the last," are true not only because of what Paul Revere did but because this very poem was written:

> So through the night rode Paul Revere;
> And so through the night went his cry of alarm
> To every Middlesex village and farm, —
> A cry of defiance and not of fear,
> A voice in the darkness, a knock at the door,
> And a word that shall echo forevermore!
> For, borne on the night-wind of the Past,
> Through all our history, to the last,
> In the hour of darkness and peril and need,
> The people will waken and listen to hear
> The hurrying hoof-beats of that steed,
> And the midnight message of Paul Revere.

"Paul Revere has ridden better since 1860 than he ever rode before."

But the two great masters to whom the civilized world is most indebted for its knowledge of the past are Shakespeare and Scott. Blot these men out and think how much of our interest in the past would go with them. Do the words Cæsar, Brutus, Antony, Cleopatra, Coriolanus, Troilus, Cressida recall a definite character to you? If so, unless you are a special student of ancient history, the probabilities are that you got your knowledge from Shakespeare. You may not have read all or any of the plays in which these names occur; you may have received your information from text-books of history, from biography, from general reading, or from a sort of infiltration that you can hardly describe. In any case, the original source of your idea of these characters was almost certainly William Shakespeare. It was he that lifted them out of the dead past and set them in the living present. The historian or biographer whom you have read may not have written with Shakespeare before him, but it would have taken a tremendous effort on his part to free himself from Shakespeare's influence. Thus if you have never read a line of Shakespeare — and the same is true of Scott — you nevertheless look at the past partly through

his eyes because you share in the historical thought of your age and country, and the historical thought of your age and country finds one of its central sources in the work of Shakespeare.

Think, too, how much history clusters about these names for you. When you recall the names you recall deeds, scenes, centuries, countries, movements, passions that you can never separate from the names. When you think of Mark Antony, for example, you think of a great oration, the greatest ever written. Cæsar's dead body is before you and a multitude of sullen or shouting Romans around you. Nineteen centuries have stood aside that you might attend the funeral of Cæsar and witness for yourself the beginning of the downfall of imperial Rome. Shakespeare did not make the facts, but he did more than any other one man to make the associations that cluster forever about the facts.

"But," you ask, "am I reading true history? Did Mark Antony really deliver that oration?" Well, here is what Shakespeare had before him:* "And therefore, when Cæsar's body was brought to the place where it should be buried, he made a

* North's translation of Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius* (Skeat's edition), page 165.

funeral oration in commendation of Cæsar, according to the ancient custom of praising noble men at their funerals. When he saw that the people were very glad and desirous also to hear Cæsar spoken of, and his praises uttered, he mingled his oration with lamentable words; and by amplifying of matters did greatly move their hearts and affections unto pity and compassion. In fine, to conclude his oration, he unfolded before the whole assembly the bloody garments of the dead, thrust through in many places with their swords, and called the malefactors cruel and cursed murtherers."

Shakespeare knew, then, that Antony spoke "in commendation of Cæsar," that he "mingled his oration with lamentable words," that he moved his hearers "unto pity and compassion," that he held up "the bloody garments of the dead," and called the malefactors "cruel and cursed murtherers." What a mountain of eloquence Shakespeare has reared out of this molehill of facts! Is it false history that he teaches us? By no means. It is real history illuminated. Light does not lie. To say that Antony made a great speech is only a part of the truth. Before I can assimilate this bare fact I must know what is meant by a great

speech at that particular world crisis. Shakespeare tells me, and no man has lived who could have told me with equal power and truth.

Cleopatra's name suggests to-day a certain Oriental magnificence that no one had phrased till Shakespeare phrased it. Plutarch describes her meeting with Antony thus:* "Therefore, when she was sent to by divers letters, both from Antonius himself and also from his friends, she made so light of it, and mocked Antonius so much, that she disdained to set forward otherwise, but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus; the poop whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the music of flutes, howboys, cithernes, viols, and such other instruments as they played upon in the barge. And now for the person of herself, she was laid under a pavilion of cloth of gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus, commonly drawn in picture: and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretty fair boys apparelled as painters do set forth god Cupid, with little fans in their hands, with the which they fanned wind upon her."

* North's translation of Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius* (Skeat's edition), pages 174–175.

That is a brilliant description, but it is overdone. It would never have lived. The picture is too crowded. It dazzles rather than illuminates. Note now how the master lets his imagination play swiftly about this scene, how he removes its superfluities, how he interprets its parts, and sets it at last in the world's picture gallery:

> The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Burn'd on the water: the poop was beaten gold;
> Purple the sails, and so perfumèd that
> The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggar'd all description: she did lie
> In her pavilion — cloth-of-gold of tissue —
> O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature: on each side her
> Stood pretty dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
> With divers-colour'd fans, whose wind did seem
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
> And what they undid did.

I like to remember that Shakespeare and Scott as interpreters of the past did not begin with ancient history. They began nearer home and nearer their own time. Shakespeare's apprenticeship was served in English history and in a period of that history in which he could supple-

ment the old chronicles by consulting old men and living traditions. He has made the Wars of the Roses the most romantic period of English history and a stepping-stone over which he passed to more remote periods. Here is his phrasing, and now the traditional phrasing, of how these wars began. Richard Plantagenet, leader of the faction of the White Rose and afterward Duke of York, says:

> * Let him that is a true-born gentleman
> And stands upon the honour of his birth,
> If he suppose that I have pleaded truth,
> From off this brier pluck a white rose with me.

John Beaufort, leader of the faction of the Red Rose and afterward Duke of Somerset, replies:

> Let him that is no coward nor no flatterer,
> But dare maintain the party of the truth,
> Pluck a red rose from off this thorn with me.

The Earl of Warwick then prophesies:

> This brawl to-day,
> Grown to this faction in the Temple Garden,
> Shall send between the red rose and the white
> A thousand souls to death and deadly night.

Now the decisive battles of the Wars of the Roses were fought in Warwickshire, and War-

* *Henry VI*, Part I, Act II, Scene IV.

wickshire was Shakespeare's home county. A wealth of material had been handed down from lip to lip and Shakespeare made the best use of it. Much of the history, therefore, on which he began to work was history that he had heard narrated in his youth and early manhood. The battle of Bosworth Field, in which Richard III was killed and which ended the Wars of the Roses by bringing together again the two rival factions, was fought only seventy-nine years before Shakespeare was born. In the preface to *The Houses of York and Lancaster*, James Gairdner, the historian, says:

"For this period of English history we are fortunate in possessing an unrivalled interpreter in our great dramatic poet Shakespeare. Following the guidance of such a master mind, we realize for ourselves the men and actions of the period in a way we cannot do in any other epoch. . . . The doings of that stormy age, the sad calamities endured by kings, the sudden changes of fortune endured by great men, the glitter of chivalry, and the horrors of civil war, all left a deep impression upon the mind of the nation, which was kept alive by vivid traditions of the past *at the time that our great dramatist wrote.*"

Shakespeare's English historical plays are a treasure house of historical interpretation more valuable than that possessed by any other nation. Wherever they are translated — and all foreign languages know them — a bit of England's past goes with them. They are valuable, however, not so much for their facts as for the setting and interpretation of the facts which the dramatist has made. They are valuable also because they remind us that in English life Shakespeare saw hints of all life. In the near he glimpsed the remote. In the present he saw the vision of the past. He was to look far behind him, but he looked around him first.

As painter and spokesman of the past Scott is the only other writer of modern times whose range and appeal put him in the class with Shakespeare. "I can call spirits from the vasty deep," Shakespeare makes one of his characters say; and the reply is:

> Why, so can I, or so can any man;
> But will they come when you do call for them?

They come when Shakespeare and Scott "call for them," as they come at the call of no others. There have been excellent historical novels writ-

ten since Scott's time. Bulwer-Lytton's *Last Days of Pompeii*, Thackeray's *Henry Esmond* and *The Virginians*, Charles Kingsley's *Hypatia* and *Westward Ho!* Charles Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth*, George Eliot's *Romola*, and Dickens's *Tale of Two Cities* have each called a definite and interesting portion of history from "the vasty deep," and thus enlarged our historical retrospect. But these authors came after Scott, they built upon Scott, and they admitted or would have to admit their indebtedness to Scott, as Scott admitted his indebtedness to Shakespeare. Of none of them could it be said, as Goethe said of Scott: "He is equal to his subject in every direction in which it takes him. The king, the royal brother, the prince, the head of the clergy, the nobles, the magistracy, the citizens and mechanics, the Highlanders, are all drawn with the same sure hand and hit off with equal truth."

What had been dry bones sprang at the touch of this Wizard of the North into living forms. All nations have gone to school in history to Walter Scott. He was more than the founder of the historical novel. His coming meant a new appeal for history, a new attitude toward the past, a new source of knowledge and sympathy, a new realiza-

tion of the oneness of human life. He did not venture into Shakespeare's realm of Roman or Greek history, but, beginning with Scotland in the eighteenth century, the century in which he was born, he went as far back as the eleventh. Only once, in *St. Ronan's Well*, did he touch the nineteenth century. To the eighteenth century belong twelve of his novels, to the seventeenth seven, to the sixteenth four, to the fifteenth three, to the fourteenth one, to the twelfth three, and to the eleventh one. Twenty-one of his thirty-two novels have their scenes laid wholly or partly in Scotland. The other places over whose past he has stretched his magic wand are England, Wales, France, Germany, Flanders, Switzerland, the Orkney and Shetland Islands, Turkey, Palestine, and India. In the number of centuries and countries traversed and in the variety and vividness of his work no other novelist is his equal.

Like Shakespeare, Scott was more "folksy" than bookish. He tramped about the country so much in search of historical places and of people who could tell him of historical places that his father said he was better fitted for a peddler than a lawyer. He is careful to tell us in his notes and prefaces that though he does not copy landscapes

and castles, those that he had actually seen furnished him with the main outlines. Writing of his boyhood, Scott once said: "Show me an old castle or field of battle and I was at home at once, filled it with its combatants in their proper costume, and overwhelmed my hearers by the enthusiasm of my description." One of his precepts was: "Never neglect to talk to people with whom you are casually thrown." His biographer, Lockhart, says of him: "He conversed with his coachman if he sat by him — as he often did, on the box — with his footman, if he chanced to be in his rumble. Indeed, he did not confine his humanity to his own people; any steady-going servant of a friend of his was soon considered as a sort of friend too, and was sure to have a kind little colloquy to himself at coming or going."

Almost every one who in his mature years has lived for any length of time in a foreign land begins by thinking foreigners radically different from himself and from his own people. But a longer stay and a deeper knowledge lead him to see that the real differences are few and that human nature is essentially one everywhere. This is the testimony of the masters in all lands. But Shakespeare and Scott tell us more than that: they

tell us that human nature is not only the same in different lands but in different and far-distant centuries. They are our most vivid historians, because, from reading books of the past and men of the present, they had come to the conclusion that human nature, though of many patterns, is of one substance. Montaigne's *Essays* was one of the few books that we know both Shakespeare and Scott read. We can be equally sure that they both applauded this saying of Montaig e's: "'Tis one and the same nature that rolls on her course, and whoever has sufficiently considered the present state of things might certainly conclude as to both the future and the past."

We hear much to-day of "the national memory." The phrase is a vague but suggestive one. What is the national memory? What do nations remember? The question can never be accurately answered, because different nations remember different things and the things that any one nation remembers to-day may be differently interpreted and therefore differently remembered as the years go by. But are we not now in a position to look at the question from a definite and helpful point of view? People do not remember their national history or the world's history in its

orderly sequence. They do not have a text-book memory. Names, dates, facts, events of the past are not in their nature adhesive. They adhere, at least, not in exact ratio to their importance, but more nearly in ratio to the interest and breadth and vision with which they are told. To be remembered, they must be made to fit not only into the framework of the nation's history, but into the framework of the human heart. Books, talk, and newspapers are the most active agencies in bringing facts to the door of memory. It is literature that lets them in. A nation remembers only a small part of its past, but that part is the part in which literature has helped to get the fact ready for the people and the people ready for the fact.

It is writers like those about whom we have spoken that have done most to store the national memories. They have said to the past: "You have certain things that need to be a part of the present. Give them to us and we will so write them on the tablets of the heart that to know them will be to cherish them." And the past has yielded them. Whatever men and events of the past you can afford to neglect, these rescued men and events are not of them, for these are making

history. "Each deed thou hast done," Browning makes young David say to Saul, "dies, revives, goes to work in the world." These are the men and events that have died, that have revived, that have gone to work in the world. They are training the will and the imagination of young and old. They are bringing the people of each nation and the people of all nations closer together. They are building up century by century the international mind framed out of common heroisms and common admirations. They are making the nation's memory a part of the world's memory.

CHAPTER V

It Can Show You the Glory of the Commonplace

THERE is a widespread feeling that literature, especially poetry, has little to do with thought of any kind, and even less to do with our thoughts about common everyday things. Some one has phrased this feeling as follows:

> In penning a rhyme, said a Poet,
> Have a plenty of ink and then go it —
> With an uplifting rune, a maid and a moon,
> Some theeing and thouing, and maying in June,
> But never a thought if you know it.

No poet ever used such language as that. A poetaster may have written that stanza, but not a poet. In fact, poetasters often refer to poetry as nothing more than an entertainment, a diversion, a pastime. Now, if poetry, if literature in general, is a mere pastime, a refined means of idling away a tedious hour, an ornamental accomplishment admitting to society, then it is doomed. There are so many more

valuable disciplines knocking at the door to-day that poetry, if it has no higher claim, might just as well quit the field. The things that men are going to read in the coming age are the things that broaden and hearten and energize them.

The appreciation of poetry *is* a diversion, but it is a vast deal more. It is the most effective and the most accessible of all the means whereby a man may vitalize his thinking about the common, elemental things of life. And to do this, to feel the greatness and the wide relationships of every-day things, is to receive a new access of power and happiness. "Genius," said Professor James Frederick Ferrier, "is nothing else than the power of seeing wonders in common things."

But the difficulty lies here: so many people think that, while prose may mean something, poetry is mere prettiness. They are convinced at least that the poet, even the great poet, did not write for them, but for readers whose tastes and needs are utterly different from theirs. When they read poetry, if they deign to read it, their first thought is, "Why did not the author put what he had to say into fewer and plainer words?" Now the readers who adopt this attitude toward poetry are just as sensible and sincere as any other

readers. In this matter, however, they are merely drifting with the current. They have adopted or inherited a popular misconception without stopping to ask what the poet or poem really means. They are thus depriving themselves not only of a source of unfailing stimulus but of the best means by which they can make their own thinking effective.

Let us recur for a moment to a phrase used on page 7. In his note to Lincoln, written after the Gettysburg address, you remember that Everett said: "I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes." "The central idea of the occasion" — that phrase sums up admirably the goal of the true poet. He has a passion for central ideas. He interprets life in terms of central ideas, and he has also the genius so to express these central ideas that they take a fresh hold on the thought of the reader and become central also in his thinking. These central ideas are of right the common property of all, but they have become dulled and dimmed by neglect or misuse. The poets are those who in every age keep the fires lighted on the altars of the common and the central.

In reading poetry, then, remember that the central thing is the central thought. It was a great English poet, Coleridge, who said: "No man was ever yet a great poet without being at the same time a profound philosopher." It was a great American poet, Lowell, who said: "No poem ever makes me respect its author which does not in some way convey a truth of philosophy." There will be beauty, of course, but the beauty came because the thought was thought out so deeply, so intensely, so completely, so relatedly. Beauty in literature is not something added from the outside. It is in the framework of the whole. It is the product of adequate thinking. It is thought intensified. In reading a poem do not begin with a search for beauty or striking phrases or rare words or fine figures of speech or the structure of sentences or the build of stanzas. Get hold of the central thought. Turn it over and over. Try to put it into your own words. Find illustrations of it in things that you have seen or heard or experienced. Try to see it as a whole, then in its parts, then in the relation of the parts to the whole, then in its radiations into other realms, but stick to the thought. Whenever a man says "How beautiful!" before he knows what a poem

means, he does violence to beauty as well as to sense.

What, now, are some of these common elemental things about which we think so frequently but so fruitlessly? No list can be exhaustive and, besides, each reader will have his own list. But if you will analyze the objects of your thinking for even one day they will probably be found to fall into some such threefold classification as this:

I. There will be certain simple visible things that claim your attention. It may be a flower, a bird, a flag, a picture, a house, a street. It may be almost anything that nature shows us or that man has made. "At bottom," said Goethe, "no real object is unpoetical if the poet knows how to use it properly." About most objects, whether in nature or art, whole books have been written. There are books on birds and on almost every kind of bird, as there are books on pictures and on almost every single great picture. But the poet proceeds differently. He follows Flaubert's advice: "Look at a tree until it appears to you just as it appears to every one else; then look at it till you see what no man has ever seen before."

Wordsworth had this service of the poet in mind when he wrote:

> The outward shows of sky and earth,
> Of hill and valley, he has viewed;
> And impulses of deeper birth
> Have come to him in solitude.
>
> In common things that round us lie
> Some random truths he can impart;
> The harvest of a quiet eye
> That broods and sleeps on his own heart.

Mrs. Browning had the same idea in mind when she spoke of Euripides as:

> Our Euripides, the human,
> With his droppings of warm tears,
> And his touches of things common
> Till they rose to touch the spheres.

Tennyson once found a flower growing not in the solid earth but in the dust that vagrant winds had swept into the crack of a wall. The very frailty and insignificance of such a flower led Tennyson to take it as the best illustration of how the little things contain the great:

> Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out of the crannies,
> I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower — but if I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is.

These lines do not tell us much about the flower, but, if I mistake not, they at least suggest the ministry of common things when common things are viewed sympathetically. They at least put one to thinking about the little-big things or the big-little things of life. They remind us that the smallest things are ladders stretching straight to the greatest, and that to know one thing perfectly we should have to know all things. But might not Tennyson have taken a grain of sand or a particle of dust instead of a flower? Hardly. These are not growing things. He wanted to illustrate the oneness of life rather than the oneness of matter. He took, therefore, not only a tiny growing object but one that appealed to man by its beauty. To understand this little flower we should have to understand its divine cause and its human effect — that is, "what God and man is."

We have seen how Oliver Wendell Holmes and Nathaniel Hawthorne and Sidney Lanier took, respectively, a chambered nautilus, a huge rock in the mountains, and a river in Georgia and made teachers of idealism out of them. William Wordsworth has perhaps done more than any one else to invest the common things of nature with new meaning and beauty, just as Kipling in modern

times has surpassed all others in interpreting the things that man has made. Read Kipling's *Song of the Banjo* and you will never again think that a banjo is nothing but a banjo. Here is the second stanza:

In the silence of the camp before the fight,
When it's good to make your will and say your prayer,
You can hear my *strumpty-tumpty* overnight,
Explaining ten to one was always fair.
I'm the Prophet of the Utterly Absurd,
Of the Patently Impossible and Vain —
And when the Thing that Couldn't has occurred,
Give me time to change my leg and go again.

Was the influence of music on a scared soldier, who knows that the odds are ten to one against him in the coming fight, ever better expressed? Of course the banjo does the talking: no one else is supposed to know that the banjo *is* "the Prophet of the Utterly Absurd." The I-method is the only method possible in poems of this sort, and Kipling is its poet-laureate. The same power of illumination is shown in his poems called *The Derelict*, *The Coastwise Lights*, *Deep-Sea Cables*, *The English Flag*, and many others. The poet does not merely describe; if that were all, a kodak would be mightier than the pen. The poet interprets; or, if he describes, he describes only enough

to enable you so to visualize the object that his interpretation may be effective.

Now it would not help you greatly if you learned the particular interpretation or thought-content of all of the poems mentioned or to be mentioned, if you went no farther. But suppose you learned from poetry the habit of interpreting common things, the habit of getting out of them new meaning, new beauty, new guidance. Such an acquisition would not only put you in a position to judge the work of poets wisely and well but would make the world you live in a larger and richer world. It would mean a permanent and ever-enlarging addition to your life force.

Let us take an illustration from two poets who interpreted the same thing. Because the skylark flies straight skyward before it sings or as it sings, Wordsworth sees in it a

> Type of the wise who soar, but never roam,
> True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!

His whole poem is :

> Ethereal minstrel! pilgrim of the sky!
> Dost thou despise the earth where cares abound?
> Or, while the wings aspire, are heart and eye
> Both with thy nest upon the dewy ground?
> Thy nest which thou canst drop into at will,
> Those quivering wings composed, that music still!

Leave to the nightingale her shady wood;
A privacy of glorious light is thine;
Whence thou dost pour upon the world a flood
Of harmony, with instinct more divine;
Type of the wise who soar, but never roam;
True to the kindred points of Heaven and Home!

Because the skylark, singing high above us, is almost invisible, Shelley compares it to hidden or half-hidden things. Note the ecstasy and aptness of these similes:

Like a poet hidden
In the light of thought,
Singing hymns unbidden,
Till the world is wrought
To sympathy with hopes and fears it heeded not:

Like a high-born maiden
In a palace tower,
Soothing her love-laden
Soul in secret hour
With music sweet as love, which overflows her bower:

Like a glowworm golden
In a dell of dew
Scattering unbeholden
Its aerial hue
Among the flowers and grass which screen it from the view:

Like a rose embowered
In its own green leaves,
By warm winds deflowered,
Till the scent it gives
Makes faint with too much sweet these heavy-winged thieves.

The secret of it all, thinks Shelley, is not loyalty to "the kindred points of Heaven and Home," but gladness, mere gladness. The last stanza is:

> Teach me half the gladness
> That thy brain must know,
> Such harmonious madness
> From my lips would flow,
> The world should listen then — as I am listening now.

But if the last few lines in each case summarize the poet's interpretation, why not omit the rest? Why, in other words, did the poet talk so long around his subject before saying what he had to say? The reader who asks this question is on the highway to a real feeling for great poetry. He has at least confronted poetic art with a query that goes to the very heart of the matter. If he will stick to that point of view, if he will maintain the same sort of skepticism in the presence of every poem, however praised the poem may be in books, he will soon see poetry in a new light. Let us look a little more closely. Does not every line, every figure of speech, every word that precedes the concluding lines contribute its part toward making those lines clear and effective? Read Wordsworth's lines again and see if every streamlet of thought does not flow directly or indirectly

into the last two lines. Omit the last two lines and see if the preceding lines do not fall to pieces — beautiful pieces, perhaps, but without cohesion. Shelley's first stanza is:

> Hail to thee, blithe spirit!
> Bird thou never wert,
> That from heaven, or near it,
> Pourest thy full heart
> In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

If you changed the two beginnings would you not have to change the endings? Does not the word "pilgrim," in Wordsworth's first line, strike at once the keynote of all the rest just as the words "blithe spirit" strike the keynote of Shelley's? A pilgrim is not an aimless wanderer: he has his two "kindred points": he goes straight to his sacred shrine and then returns home. A blithe spirit is another name for "unbodied joy," and this thought of blitheness, of joy, so intense but invisible that it challenges a host of radiant comparisons, shines through Shelley's poem from beginning to end. It only culminates in the last stanza.

When we speak, then, of the central thought or central idea of a poem, we do not mean a thought or idea that summarizes all that has been said. We mean only such a thought or idea as furnishes

the foundation on which the poetic structure rests. It is a sort of nucleus or core. It gives also the best vantage ground on which to stand and survey the poem as a whole and the best angle from which to see how beauty and meaning are blended to produce the culminating effect.

II. But instead of a visible object your daily thought turns often about some incident or event that has happened to you or to others. Poetry and prose are full of the simplest incidents glorified by interpretation. Robert Burns once upturned a mountain daisy with his ploughshare, but the little flower lives and blooms to-day as it never lived and bloomed before, and all because the poet made the incident the bearer of a universal appeal. After a few stanzas of tender, exquisite thought, preparing the reader for an appeal to mind and heart, Burns drops the Scotch dialect, adopts the more universal English, and crowns the incident thus:

> Such is the fate of artless maid,
> Sweet flow'ret of the rural shade!
> By love's simplicity betray'd
> And guileless trust;
> Till she, like thee, all soil'd, is laid
> Low i' the dust.

Such is the fate of simple bard,
On life's rough ocean luckless starr'd!
Unskilful he to note the card
Of prudent lore,
Till billows rage and gales blow hard,
And whelm him o'er!

Such fate to suffering Worth is giv'n,
Who long with wants and woes has striv'n,
By human pride or cunning driv'n
To mis'ry's brink;
Till, wrench'd of ev'ry stay but Heav'n,
He ruin'd sink!

Ev'n thou who mourn'st the Daisy's fate,
That fate is thine — no distant date;
Stern Ruin's ploughshare drives elate,
Full on thy bloom,
Till crush'd beneath the furrow's weight
Shall be thy doom.

He pursues the same method in his equally well
iown lines *To a Mouse, on turning up her nest*
ith the plough. After dwelling on the "foresight"
the mouse in laying by a store for winter, the
et makes the human appeal in these stanzas:

But, Mousie, thou art no thy lane*
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft a-gley,†
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promis'd joy.

*Thou are not alone.
†Go often wrong.

Still thou art blest, compar'd wi' me!
The present only toucheth thee:
But, och! I backward cast my ee
On prospects drear!
An' forward, tho' I canna see,
I guess an' fear!

The two applications, you see, are entirely different, though both are made first to mankind in general, then to the poet himself. But both are equally apt, equally prepared for, and equally suggested by the nature of the incident that the poem treats.

Francis Scott Key and Francis Miles Finch hold each a secure place in the hearts of the American people because each interpreted an incident in terms of national appeal. Francis Scott Key was on an American ship in September, 1814, while the British were bombarding Fort McHenry, which protected Baltimore. He was not allowed by the British to land, but remained on deck during the night, watching the course of every British shell that was fired. "While the bombardment continued," wrote his brother-in-law, afterward Chief Justice R. B. Taney, "it was proof that the fort had not surrendered. But it suddenly ceased some time before day; and as they had no communication with any of the

enemy's ships, they did not know whether the fort had surrendered, or the attack upon it had been abandoned. They paced the deck for the residue of the night in painful suspense, watching with intense anxiety for the return of day, and looking every few minutes at their watches, to see how long they must wait for it; as soon as it dawned, and before it was light enough to see objects at a distance, their glasses were turned to the fort, uncertain whether they should see there the stars and stripes or the flag of the enemy. At length the light came, and they saw that 'our flag was still there.' . . . He then told me that, under the excitement of the time, he had written a song, and handed me a printed copy of *The Star-Spangled Banner.*"

In the spring of 1867, Francis Miles Finch, of New York, afterward a judge and for a time dean of the law school of Cornell University, read in a daily paper that the women of Columbus, Mississippi, had decorated alike the graves of Federal and Confederate soldiers. Touched by the beauty of such an act he wrote *The Blue and the Gray*, a poem that more than any other helped to heal the scars of war and to usher in the era of complete reconciliation. Note in the last three

stanzas how the refrains, like the women of Columbus,

> With a touch impartially tender,

award equal honours to both sides. Indeed the refrains carry the central thought:

> So, when the summer calleth,
> On forest and field of grain,
> With an equal murmur falleth
> The cooling drip of the rain:
> Under the sod and the dew,
> Waiting the judgment day;
> Wet with the rain, the Blue,
> Wet with the rain, the Gray.
>
> Sadly, but not with upbraiding,
> The generous deed was done,
> In the storm of the years that are fading
> No braver battle was won:
> Under the sod and the dew,
> Waiting the judgment day;
> Under the blossoms, the Blue,
> Under the garlands, the Gray.
>
> No more shall the war cry sever,
> Or the winding rivers be red;
> They banish our anger forever
> When they laurel the graves of our dead!
> Under the sod and the dew,
> Waiting the judgment day:
> Love and tears for the Blue,
> Tears and love for the Gray.

James Russell Lowell was once in a railroad car when some one began to talk about the great poet whose example we cited a few pages back. The result was Lowell's famous poem, *An Incident in a Railroad Car:*

He spoke of Burns: men rude and rough
Pressed round to hear the praise of one
Whose heart was made of manly, simple stuff,
As homespun as their own.

Lowell learned from the incident a new ideal of poetry:

Never did Poesy appear
So full of heaven to me, as when
I saw how it would pierce through pride and fear
To the lives of coarsest men.

It may be glorious to write
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight
Once in a century;

But better far it is to speak
One simple word, which now and then
Shall waken their free nature in the weak
And friendless sons of men;

To write some earnest verse or line,
Which, seeking not the praise of art,
Shall make a clearer faith and manhood shine
In the untutored heart.

> He who doth this, in verse or prose,
> May be forgotten in his day,
> But surely shall be crowned at last with those
> Who live and speak for aye.

Now this ability to vitalize passing incidents by interpreting them humanly is possessed to a degree by every one, but it is capable of indefinite cultivation. Public speakers who use apt anecdotes have this power. Every one who in public or private narrates an incident to illustrate a point must first, if the application is original, have interpreted the incident and got hold of its central idea. Otherwise he could not attach the incident, for central ideas are the only hooks by which proper attachments can be made. Benjamin Franklin's fund of apt incident and illustration was due not to breadth of reading but to disciplined practice in making ordinary incidents yield their full measure of everyday truth. Take such an incident as that told in *The Whistle*, from which we get the expression "to pay dear for your whistle." This widely current saying is merely the interpretation by a wise man of a childhood experience. But the poet's interpretation is deeper and more many-sided. It touches the heart as well as the head. It brings beauty and

imagination to bear on life. It finds us at more points. It is not prudential but inspirational. Franklin's interpretations are admirable in their way, but it is not the way of Burns in the poems already cited. It is not the way of Cowper in his lines *On the Receipt of My Mother's Picture*, or of Keats in his poem *On First Looking Into Chapman's Homer*, or of Wordsworth in his poem called *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud*, or of Browning in his *Incident of the French Camp*.

Compare the two methods for yourself; or, better still, take some incident in your own life and try to make a purely practical application of it in the Franklin way and then a more humane interpretation of it in the spirit, if not in the form, of the poets just cited.

III. Instead of an incident, however, you find yourself frequently thinking about a situation. A situation bears the same relation to an incident that still water bears to running water. In other words, an incident is a story, a narrative, while a situation is more like a picture. In telling a story that you have read or heard, did you ever notice that you use past tenses, while in describing a picture you use present tenses? For example, you

say: "It was the story of a man who *left* home and *took* with him only a dog," etc. But if it is a picture that you are describing you say: "It was the picture of a man *leaving* home and *taking* with him only a dog," etc. The situation is like the picture in that you think of it in present tenses. There is nearly always some narrative in poems that treat a situation because something usually takes place, but the narrative is incidental or preparatory. The essential thing is the resultant situation. Interesting examples are *The Cotter's Saturday Night* by Burns, *Snow-Bound* by Whittier, *Rizpah* by Tennyson, *The Bell Buoy* by Kipling, and *The Man with the Hoe* by Edwin Markham.

To make a situation give up its full yield of suggestion or of guidance you must have the facts well in hand. Observation, as elsewhere, must precede interpretation. The poets and short-story writers usually unlock a difficult situation by the same instrument that they used in constructing it—that is, by imagination. But imagination does not, even with them, take the place of a close scrutiny of the facts: it is built on such a scrutiny. If they make up the situation, they put in nothing that they do not use, and use nothing that they have not deliberately put in.

No building was ever erected so closely compacted or with every part doing so perfectly its work as is the case in the best short poems or short stories. These are models for training in accuracy of observation and therefore in truth of interpretation. Kipling's *Bell Buoy*, for example, is of course purely fanciful. But no one could make a bell buoy talk as this bell buoy talks unless he had observed minutely the construction and the work both of bell buoys and of church bells, and unless he had at the same time a profound sympathy with certain elements of human nature. The central thought in the poem is the contrast between a service that actually saves people and one that merely summons them to church to be saved. The bell buoy, it is true, brags outrageously of his superiority to the church bell, but he is egged on to it by human nature, yours and mine, which Kipling is only reporting and interpreting.

Among American authors the man whose work furnishes the fairest field for the study of situations is Nathaniel Hawthorne. The question with Hawthorne was usually not, "How may I tell an interesting story?" but "How may I get out of an interesting situation all there is in it?" In his *American Note-Book*, which contains jottings for

future short stories, we find entries like these: "An odd volume in a large library. Every one to be afraid to unclasp and open it, because it was said to be a book of magic." "A man, virtuous in his general conduct, but committing habitually some monstrous crime, as murder, and doing this without the sense of guilt, but with a peaceful conscience, habit, probably, reconciling him to it; but something (for instance, discovery) occurs to make him sensible of his enormity. His horror then." Out of the following jotting came Hawthorne's story of *The White Old Maid:* "A change from a gay young girl to an old woman; the melancholy events, the effects of which have clustered around her character, and gradually imbued it with their influence, till she becomes a lover of sick-chambers, taking pleasure in receiving dying breaths and in laying out the dead; also leaving her mind full of funeral reminiscences, and possessing more acquaintances beneath the burial turf than above it."

But the greatest master of the situation is Robert Browning. He is the Shakespeare of the situation, the man who first gave it an adequate voice. It is true that many of his situations are not usual or ordinary, but the habit of getting out

of an everyday situation all there is in it for you can be acquired in his pages better, I think, than in the pages of any other writer. Almost all of his shorter poems are dramatic monologues, and a dramatic monologue is nothing but a poem that illuminates a condensed situation. There are only three things to consider in a dramatic monologue: (1) The situation itself; (2) the speaker — there is never more than one — who unfolds the situation; and (3) the person or persons spoken to. The latter never speak, but they are an essential part of the poem. The following is one of Browning's characteristic dramatic monologues:

THE PATRIOT

An Old Story

It was roses, roses, all the way,
With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
A year ago on this very day.

The air broke into a mist with bells,
The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.
Had I said, "Good folk, mere noise repels —
But give me your sun from yonder skies!"
They had answered, "And afterward, what else?"

Alack, it was I who leaped at the sun,
To give it my loving friends to keep!
Naught man could do, have I left undone:
And you see my harvest, what I reap
This very day, now a year is run.

There's nobody on the house-tops now —
Just a palsied few at the windows set;
For the best of the sight is, all allow,
At the Shambles' Gate — or, better yet,
By the very scaffold's foot, I trow.

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

Thus I entered, and thus I go!
In triumphs, people have dropped down dead.
"Paid by the world, what dost thou owe
Me?" — God might question; now, instead,
'Tis God shall repay: I am safer so.

At a first reading this poem will doubtless seem to you vague or perhaps meaningless. But it is neither. (1) The situation here is the crisis in a man's life. A year ago he was the popular idol and might have asked even the impossible of the "good folk" who could not do enough for him. Now, bound and stoned, he is being hurried

to the scaffold. The same crowd that applauded him a year ago has gone exultantly to see the execution, except "a palsied few" who have asked to be wheeled to the windows. (2) The speaker is a hero and fronts death philosophically. There is not a word of complaint. He even prefers death now to death a year ago. Had it come then, in triumph, God would have required much, for much had been given. Now, however, the injustice of it all puts God in his debt. That, at least, is the way the patriot feels about it. (3) The person addressed is referred to in only one line, "And *you* see my harvest." He is doubtless the sheriff, an officer who had witnessed many similar revulsions of public feeling and who was also near enough to the patriot to hear what was said. He knew better than any one else that it was "an old story," though he says nothing.

Was the fickleness of the mob ever portrayed more vividly? Yet not a word is said about fickleness. You have to make your own interpretation, but, as in real life, your interpretation will be valid in exact proportion to your mastery of all the details that make the situation what it is.

Do we not begin to see now how and why the

poets make their appeal? They do not argue. They take common objects or incidents or situations and let the central thought out. Every great piece of literature is a sort of emancipation proclamation. The "imprisoned splendour" was already there: it needed only to be liberated. Sometimes this imprisoned splendour, when it is released, takes the form of patriotism as in Burns's *Scots, wha hae wi' Wallace bled;* sometimes of love as in Coleridge's *Genevieve;* sometimes of the homing instinct as in John Howard Payne's *Home, Sweet Home;* sometimes of mournful remembrance as in Poe's *Raven;* sometimes of a call to service in a never-ending conflict as in Lowell's lines on *The Present Crisis;* sometimes of a plea for the poor who, perhaps with unfulfilled renown, lie in unhonoured graves as in Gray's *Elegy.*[1] But there is always a central thought and this thought is usually the heart of some unrealized object or incident or situation.

Men are learning every day the greatness of what used to be called the commonplace. But they have not yet learned that the glory of the commonplace was itself a commonplace to Burns,

[1]The central thought in Gray's *Elegy* is the country churchyard *versus* Westminster Abbey. The poem is not a rambling meditation on death in general.

Goethe, Browning, Emerson, and men of their kind. Emerson spoke for them all when he said:

'Tis not in the high stars alone,
Nor in the cup of budding flowers,
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There alway, alway something sings.

CHAPTER VI

It can give you the mastery of your own language

IT WILL be taken for granted in this chapter that "your own language" is the English language. Illustrations will, therefore, be drawn only from English. But the principle holds good for all languages: the only way to master a language is to get at it through literature, not through text-books on language.

Hitherto we have spoken of literature as thought and mood. We are now to speak of it as form. Thought and mood cannot be communicated till they are put into some sort of form. But when they are clothed or "fleshed," as Carlyle would have us say, in written words, we can communicate them to others, we can keep them by us, we can talk about them as easily as we talk about trees or houses. Form is not only the dress or flesh of thought: it is the net in which we capture and keep thought for future use.

One of the most astonishing things about

literature is the fewness of the forms or nets necessary to hold it. From Homer to Kipling there stretch about three thousand years. Books have been written in all of these years, but when we come to sum up the forms that literature has taken we find they are only eleven. Every great thought that has come down to us has been housed in one of these eleven forms or types. They include, in poetry, epic poems or epics, lyric poems or lyrics, dramatic poems or dramas, and ballads; they include, in prose, histories, orations, biographies, letters, essays, novels, and short stories. Many books have been written about each of these types of literature, but the best way to learn them is not from books about them but from specimens of them. If you will read only a few standard specimens of each of these types and then try to put into plain language how each type differs from every other type, you will have taken an important step in understanding and appreciating the whole question of literary form. In fact, this way of studying literature — by types, I mean, instead of by nations or literary epochs — is becoming more and more popular every year. Let us glance rapidly at these types in English and American literature.

In **epic poetry** the English-speaking world has nothing equal to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or Virgil's *Aeneid*. These are long narrative poems dealing with a nation's heroic past. Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are long narrative poems and are therefore epics. But they are not national epics. They deal with events that did not concern England any more than they concerned other nations. In American literature our best epics are minor epics. The narrative poems of Longfellow, *Evangeline*, *Hiawatha*, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, and *Paul Revere's Ride*, are the best known of these.

In **lyric poetry** — that is, in short poems that express personal emotions — the literature of the English-speaking race is as rich as the literature of any nation in history. The four volumes of select poetry mentioned on pages 32-33 contain hardly anything except lyric poetry. All hymn-books are made up of lyric poems, because they express personal emotions — the joys and sorrows, the faith and hope of those that wrote them and of those that sing them. But if a poem tells a story, like Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, or Clement Clarke Moore's *The Night Before Christmas*, or

Fitz-Greene Halleck's *Marco Bozzaris*, it is epic, not lyric.

The **drama**, like the epic, is a narrative and a rather long narrative. But it is written not to be read but to be seen. The question in the dramatist's mind is not "How would this read?" but "How would this look on the stage?" Shakespeare, of course, gives England first rank in the drama. In America we have no national drama. American history furnishes excellent themes, however, for dramatic treatment, and there is a prospect just now for better dramas than we have ever had. But as yet it is only a prospect.

There are two kinds of **ballads.** The first are the old ballads which nobody wrote but which just grew up around some heroic or pathetic event. Of course somebody must have made a beginning, but as the ballad passed down from sire to son and from century to century it grew so in the handling that it is customary now to say that the people made it. England and Scotland have three hundred and five of these. The best known are perhaps *Sir Patrick Spens*, *Bonny Barbara Allen*, and *The Hunting of the Cheviot*, sometimes called *Chevy Chase*. America is not old enough for this sort of ballad, though *Yankee Doodle*

almost belongs here. The second kind of ballad is the modern or imitation ballad. The two best in American literature seem to me Longfellow's *Wreck of the Hesperus*, and George Henry Boker's *Ballad of Sir John Franklin*. Read the three folk-ballads just mentioned and see if you cannot tell why these two American poems are called imitation ballads.

In the writing of history the greatest genius that England has produced is Edward Gibbon. His *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* has held its own better and has had more influence upon other writers of history than any other single history written by an Englishman. The history of England has been written with most charm by the Earl of Clarendon, David Hume, Macaulay, and Froude. Each has treated, however, only a section of English history. The most widely read and the most readable history of England from the beginning to the present time is J. R. Green's *History of the English People*. Our American classics — those about which there can be least dispute — are George Bancroft's *History of the United States*, though it ends with the Revolutionary Period; William Hickling Prescott's *History of the Reign of Ferdinand and*

Isabella; John Lothrop Motley's *Rise of the Dutch Republic;* Francis Parkman's *France and England in North America,* and John Fiske's *The Critical Period of American History.* In both England and America the coöperative method of writing history is now coming more and more into vogue. There is usually one editor-in-chief with a number of associates under his general direction. There are excellencies and defects in the coöperative method. The variety of the parts is sometimes greater than the oneness of the whole. It is a case where the whole may not be equal to the sum of all its parts.

In oratory the two English-speaking peoples have for a century and a half taken the lead. This is due partly to the nature of the English language, which lends itself easily to the uses of public address, partly to the freedom of speech which the two countries have enjoyed, and partly to the bigness of the subjects which they have had to discuss. In both countries great orations have marked the pathway of advancing democracy. The average American is a better public speaker than the average Englishman, but England has had a few orators whose speeches have stood the test of time better than the speeches

of American orators. Oratory is diffused throughout America; it tends more to crystallize in England. Judged by the test of time, Edmund Burke was the greatest orator of the English-speaking race, and Daniel Webster was the greatest orator of America. You can find no better examples of modern oratory than Burke's speech on *Conciliation with America* and Webster's *Reply to Hayne*. Read also the speech of Hayne to which Webster was replying. These speeches deal with issues long since dead, but they deal with them in a spirit and method that can be applied equally as well to issues of to-day and to-morrow.

In **biography** Englishmen have been peculiarly successful with Englishmen, while Americans have succeeded best with those who were not Americans. Boswell's *Life of Johnson* remains the supreme classic, but worthy of a place on the shelf with it are Southey's *Life of Nelson*, Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay*, and Morley's *Life of Gladstone*. Among the greatest biographies of Americans by Americans may be mentioned John Marshall's *Life of Washington*, Samuel Longfellow's *Life of Longfellow*, and Alexander V. G. Allen's *Life of Phillips Brooks*.

Each of these covers a distinct period of our history and appeals to a wide but different range of interests. Mention should be made also of Lounsbury's admirable though brief *Life of James Fenimore Cooper* in the American Men of Letters Series. The three works, however, that have best represented American scholarship and narrative skill in foreign lands are Irving's *Life and Voyages of Columbus*, Motley's *Life and Death of John of Barneveldt*, and Parkman's *Montcalm and Wolfe*. Autobiography is, of course, a kind of biography, and a most interesting kind. With the exception of Boswell's *Life of Johnson* it is probable that *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* has found more readers than any book mentioned in this paragraph. It is a model of its kind, though it ends with the year 1757. Franklin died in the year 1790. Thus thirty-three years of his life, years of the greatest international renown, are left unaccounted for. For these years we must go to Franklin's letters.

The best **letters** are found in biographies. In fact, it is impossible to write a man's life unless you let his letters speak for him. The letter is one of the oldest forms of literature. Cicero has left more than eight hundred letters. St. Paul's

letters number fourteen and make up about one fifth of the New Testament. English and American literature is very rich in letters, perhaps richer than any other literature except that of France. Some of these are narrative letters, while others — and these are usually the most entertaining — give only the writer's own feelings about men and things. Two of the most famous of the second kind are Lincoln's letter to Mrs. Bixby (November 21, 1864), and Robert E. Lee's letter accepting conditionally the presidency of Washington College (August 24, 1865). You will notice that no letter ever yet found its way into literature that began, "Yours of 30th ult. rec'd and contents noted. In reply would say," or that ended, "Yours resp.," or "Yours aff."

The essay is one of the glories of English literature. Bacon, Addison, Lamb, Macaulay, Matthew Arnold, and Huxley are some of those who have made the essay the delight and the power that it is to-day among English-speaking people. There are two kinds of essay — the chatty, entertaining, pastime kind, and the more serious essay that seeks to inform and convince. Addison and Lamb lead the list in the first kind; Bacon, Macaulay, Arnold, and Huxley in the

second kind. Our two greatest American essayists, Emerson and Lowell, belong also to the last named class. The essayists who write to entertain deal chiefly with a mood or fancy; those who write to convince deal more with what they feel to be the unsettled problems of life. But no writer, however witty or however learned, deserves the name of essayist unless he can use familiarly and effectively the resources of the English language, for the essay marks the pinnacle of English prose style. Whether the essayist entertains or informs, or whether, as usual, he does both, he must show himself a consummate master of his craft. If he does not, we may call his work a treatise but not an essay.

The **novel** and the **short story** belong together, though they did not start together. They are the two youngest children in the family of literature and both have epic blood in their veins. The short story is not a condensed novel and the novel is not an expanded short story. They have to be planned differently from the start, just as a cathedral and a chapel have to be planned differently; an architect cannot begin with the one and end with the other without making a botch of it. In novel writing England has led

the world. Scott, Dickens, George Eliot, and Thackeray, though they did not found the novel, have done most to show its possibilities. But till the coming of Robert Louis Stevenson and Rudyard Kipling, England was weak in short stories. It had nothing to compare with the best short stories of Washington Irving, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Bret Harte, Mark Twain, or O. Henry. James Fenimore Cooper was the founder of the American novel and Nathaniel Hawthorne, in *The Scarlet Letter*, proved himself our greatest artist in the novel. Our genius for narration, however, still finds its natural channel in the short story. The short story is narration reduced to its essentials. It is the old epic stripped for its last race.

As soon as you begin to think in these eleven units of literature you will find your feeling for form getting more and more disciplined. But begin with these units. The smallest units are words; the largest units are the types just mentioned. To begin with words is like beginning the study of architecture by studying single bricks or stones. Dr. Samuel Johnson does tell us of a man who carried a brick around with him as a specimen of a house that he wanted to sell.

But his mistake was no greater than that of the man who thinks that mastery of language should begin with words. Words are dead things till they are combined into one of our eleven structures.

When you have read a few specimens of each of these types you will find yourself comparing them and noting likenesses and differences. You remember that it was said on page 32 that "song and story" really include all types of literature. Let us consider the story element first. How many of our eleven types tell a story? They are epics, dramas, ballads, histories, biographies, letters given over to incidents, novels, and short stories. All of these tell in different ways what has happened or what is happening. We need no other testimony to prove to us that mankind has always been interested in events and incidents, in things that take place. We want to absorb the lesson of these haps or mishaps but cannot get hold of them till some one makes clear and vivid the human appeal in them. The remaining types belong to the song element in literature. They have to do not with happenings so much as with our own thoughts, moods, hopes, ideals, impressions, and convictions. We may body these forth in short poems if we are poets, or, if

our everyday thoughts. We give ourselves daily exercise in explaining things and in narrating things. We do this in prose, not in poetry. The road leading to mastery, then, starts from prose, and from the kinds of prose that best meet our daily needs. We may pass from these to other types — these, in fact, include the other types — but the shortest and surest road begins in the prose essay and the prose short story.

A few specimen collections of short stories have already been mentioned.[1] There are equally good collection of essays. Among these are *English Essays*, collected and edited by Walter C. Bronson; *The Great English Essayists*, with introductory essays and notes by William J. Dawson and Coningsby W. Dawson; and *A Book of English Essays* (1600-1900), selected by Stanley V. Makower and Basil H. Blackwell. The main objection, however, to compilations of this sort is that they do not contain in every case the whole of each essay included. The editors omit parts, though they try to omit only such parts as will not leave the rest scrappy. You will find it best, far best, I think, to begin with the essays of Macaulay, Arnold, and Huxley. These are models of clear thinking and effective

[1] See page 33

writing. Each essay discusses one big theme, and the essay is built around that theme as closely as a walnut is built around its kernel. These writers had a genius for essentials and an equal genius for cutting out unsparingly the things that do not count. Each is a living force in the world to-day — Macaulay in history and biography, Arnold in our ideas of culture, and Huxley in the meaning and service of science. But each is a force not only in what he says but in the way he says it. They are the three men who did more than any other three of their time to make the art of explanation both interesting and effective. You cannot follow them or any one of them long without finding your own power to explain growing by what it feeds on.

It is easy enough, however, to point to the right authors. It is easy to read them. More important than either is so to read them as to get power from their pages. There are thousands of readers of good literature whose power of self-expression shows no improvement from year to year. But it is well to remember also that whenever successful writers have expressed their indebtedness, whenever they have named the source or the first impulse from which their power came,

it was always to literature that they pointed us, never to a dictionary, or a grammar, or a rhetoric.

Why? Are dictionaries, grammars, and rhetorics useless? By no means. They are useful as stepping-stones but not as final resting-places. They are useful in calling attention to the speech of the masters, in telling us what to look for and what not to look for, in making the search interesting and the path straight. But whenever they satisfy or blunt our desire to go beyond them they are worse than useless; they rob rather than enrich. They are then like the bayous along the Mississippi. These streams flow from the great river instead of into it: they are tributaries turned wrong end foremost. When Goethe was accused of being a skeptic he replied that his was "the active skepticism, whose sole aim is to conquer itself." That is exactly the motive with which all language-helps should be used. Your dependence on them should conquer itself as soon as possible. They should create a thirst, but this thirst should be not for more of them but for the speech of the masters from which they derive every jot and tittle of the authority that they possess.

If you were to approach Macaulay or Arnold

or Huxley through the dictionary, you would approach them through their words — that is, through the words unfamiliar to you. You would say: "These writers know a great many words that I do not know. I will not let one of them escape me. With the aid of a good up-to-date dictionary, I am going to look up every word unknown to me and so add it to my speech-utensils." That sounds reasonable, but it is not. At least it is not the right motive or method with which to begin the systematic study of an author if you are studying him for language mastery. Suppose you were to read all the essays of Macaulay and Arnold and Huxley and should make a list of all the words found in them that you did not know. If you memorized the meanings of these words perfectly, would your daily speech show a noticeable improvement? I do not think so. These words would be added to your word-collection, but not necessarily to your speech-utensils. Perhaps you do not need these words except to understand passages in which they occur? That is something, of course, but it is a mere by-product. Unless your daily thought demands these words, unless you need them in your work, it will do you little good to list and learn them.

If you will think a moment about your own vocabulary — that is, about the stock of words whose meanings you know — you will find that it may be divided into two distinct parts. You have really two vocabularies. There is, first, the vocabulary that you actually use. There is, second, the vocabulary that you know but never use. The first is your writing and speaking vocabulary; it contains the words so thoroughly mastered that they do immediately the bidding of your thought. This is your dynamic vocabulary, your vocabulary of power. The second is your reading and hearing vocabulary; it contains the words which you know when you read them or hear them but which have hitherto refused to do the bidding of your thought. You have never used them. This is your static vocabulary, your vocabulary of knowledge. Knowledge is not power in this case — it is only possible power; it becomes actual power only when a passive word steps over into the list of active words and does work there for which it is better fitted than the word that you have been using in its place. Every man does well to increase his knowledge-vocabulary; he does vastly better to increase his power-vocabulary. Knowledge words are lumber

waiting in the factory; power words are furniture used in the home.

The masters of language at the present time, those whose works carry farthest, are not those whose pages would furnish you with the longest list of new words. They are those who use familiar words in apt but unexpected places; they show you old friends with new powers; they know not only the first meanings of everyday words but the wider service that these words can do if properly harnessed to other words. Literature, not the dictionary, is a storage-battery and the only storage-battery for this kind of word-power, the word-power that comes from the known but unused, from the familiar but unrealized. Macaulay, Arnold, and Huxley, if rightly used, can double your word-power without adding a new word to your vocabulary. But, whether known or unknown, words do not furnish the right method of approach. We must begin with a larger unit, with a cluster of words, and go from the cluster to the individual word. A word is not alive till it finds itself in company.

If you approach our three writers from the side of grammar, you approach them through their sentences. The sentence is to grammar what the

word is to the dictionary. But is the sentence the right unit? There are undoubtedly many brilliant sentences to be found in the pages of our three essayists. Here are a few that circulate as current coin. From Macaulay: "Men are never so likely to settle a question rightly as when they discuss it freely." "He [Byron] had a head which statuaries loved to copy, and a foot the deformity of which the beggars in the street mimicked." "An acre in Middlesex* is better than a principality in Utopia." "The Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear but because it gave pleasure to the spectator." From Arnold: "Culture looks beyond machinery, culture hates hatred: culture has one great passion, the passion for sweetness and light." "Genius is mainly an affair of energy." "Poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things, and hence its importance." "When we are asked further, 'What is conduct?' let us answer, 'Three fourths of life.'" From Huxley: "If a little knowledge is dangerous, where is the man who has so much as to be out of danger?" "Logical consequences

*Middlesex is next to the smallest county in England, but has next to the largest population. Utopia, or Nowhere, is the name given by Sir Thomas More (1478–1535) to the imaginary island about which he wrote.

are the scarecrows of fools and the beacons of wise men." "Veracity is the heart of morality." "The great end of life is not knowledge, but action."

Suppose we did with these sentences all that grammar asks us to do. Suppose we classified them, took them to pieces, put them together again, learned to name and know all their parts — should we be much better fitted to explain every-day matters to others? Should we even have found the real thought-gait of our writers? Brilliant sentences do not make a great writer. A great writer is a builder, and the sentence, like the word, is not the building unit. Sentences are not the links of prose composition. Even if we learn how to construct a few brilliant sentences, if we learn how to make and analyze all the kinds of sentences that grammar calls for, we need something around which to build them, something to practise them on. We learn to shoot not by shooting but by shooting at a target.

Putting grammar aside, let us try rhetoric. If you approach our three writers through one of the old rhetorics written a generation ago, you will find yourself plunged into figures of speech, into metaphors, similes, and the like. If you

approach our writers through a good modern rhetoric, you will find the emphasis put not upon figures of speech, not upon words or sentences, but upon the paragraph. The paragraph meets all the requirements that good writing demands. It is the real unit of authorship. The paragraph is a cluster of coöperative sentences making clear a single thought. It is like the numeral 100: if you can count 100, you can count 1,000,000,000 if you live long enough. Every prose type of literature is a chain in which the successive links are paragraphs. If it is a paragraph that explains, it is an essay in miniature; if it is a paragraph that narrates, it is a short story in miniature. The art of using language effectively is the art of building and joining paragraphs. Here are two successive paragraphs from each of our chosen essayists:

FROM MACAULAY*

"The perfect historian is he in whose work the character and spirit of an age is exhibited in miniature. He relates no fact, he attributes no expression to his characters which is not authenticated by sufficient testimony.

*Essay on History.

But by judicious selection, rejection, and arrangement, he gives to truth those attractions which have been usurped by fiction. In his narrative a due subordination is observed: some transactions are prominent; others retire. But the scale on which he represents them is increased or diminished, not according to the dignity of the persons concerned in them, but according to the degree in which they elucidate the condition of society and the nature of man. He shows us the court, the camp, and the senate. But he shows us also the nation. He considers no anecdote, no peculiarity of manner, no familiar saying, as too insignificant for his notice which is not too insignificant to illustrate the operation of laws, of religion, and of education, and to mark the progress of the human mind. Men will not merely be described, but will be made intimately known to us. The changes of manners will be indicated, not merely by a few general phrases or a few extracts from statistical documents, but by appropriate images presented in every line.

"If a man, such as we are supposing,

should write the history of England, he would assuredly not omit the battles, the sieges, the negotiations, the seditions, the ministerial changes. But with these he would intersperse the details which are the charm of historical romances. At Lincoln Cathedral there is a beautiful painted window which was made by an apprentice out of the pieces of glass which had been rejected by his master. It is so far superior to every other in the church that, according to the tradition, the vanquished artist killed himself from mortification. Sir Walter Scott, in the same manner, has used those fragments of truth which historians have scornfully thrown behind them in a manner which may well excite their envy. He has constructed out of their gleanings works which, even considered as histories, are scarcely less valuable than theirs. But a truly great historian would reclaim those materials which the novelist has appropriated. The history of the government and the history of the people would be exhibited in that mode in which alone they can be exhibited justly — in inseparable conjunction and intermixture. We

would not then have to look for the wars and votes of the Puritans in Clarendon* and for their phraseology in *Old Mortality;* for one half of King James in Hume,† and for the other half in *The Fortunes of Nigel.*"

Let us look now at these two paragraphs. Whether one agrees with Macaulay or not, he cannot read even this short selection without feeling that the great essayist illuminated whatever he touched. He had ideas and he had the constructive talent that was needed to put them clearly and memorably before his readers. What we want to do, however, is not primarily to learn facts from Macaulay or Arnold or Huxley, but to learn how to express facts. We do not want to borrow their torches, but only to light from them our own torches. We may never have to explain what they are explaining, but they can

*See page 186. The Earl of Clarendon (1608–1674) took the side of Charles I and Charles II and was opposed to the Puritans. In his great work, *History of the Rebellion in England,* while there is a great deal about the Puritans, he does not attempt to imitate their "phraseology" as Scott does in *Old Mortality.*

†See page 186. David Hume (1711–1776), author of a *History of England,* is after Clarendon the second historian of England whose work is marked by a distinct charm of style. His portrayal of James I is exceptionally brilliant, but not equal to that found in Scott's *The Fortunes of Nigel.* "No historical portrait that we possess," says R. H. Hutton, "will take precedence, as a mere portrait, of Scott's brilliant study of James I."

help us because they illustrate the principles of all explanation that is clear and effective.

To train yourself in the mastery of language by the study of the paragraph two things are necessary: First, find the subject of the paragraph; second, build a paragraph of your own with the same subject, but without having the printed page before you. Sometimes you may find it difficult to find the exact subject of a paragraph; if so, blame the author, not yourself. The search, at any rate, will prove an education in accurate thinking. There is no difficulty, however, in these two paragraphs. The subject of the first is "The perfect historian," of the second, "How the perfect historian would write the history of England." The two paragraphs are admirably joined; the second is naturally suggested by the first. If Macaulay had been an American he would have taken as the subject of his second paragraph, "How the perfect historian would write the history of the United States." That, however, is for you to think about, as indeed you can hardly help doing if you begin to think about "The perfect historian."

Perhaps you are a very busy person and have but a few spare moments for self-training in

language. Well, the paragraph is the best language-guide a busy person ever had. Take the subject of the paragraph with you. Turn it over and over. The spare moments that you snatch from your work or that you have in going to and from your work are enough. Let the thought grow in your own soil. Imagine that you have to write a paper or make a speech on the subject. You will find — I care not what your work may be — that new points of view will continually be suggested by your surroundings and by what you are doing. You know a great many things that Macaulay did not know, and some of these he would undoubtedly have used if he had known them. Truth has no walls or barbed-wire fences: little truths and big truths help each other at every turn, wander at will in each other's territory, and laugh at the boundaries which man thinks that he has established. "The perfect historian" is a big theme — any theme is big that has "perfect" attached to it — but after a while you will have thought yourself into it and through it. Then come back to the original paragraph. How does your paragraph compare with Macaulay's?

You may think about words and sentences now, because you need them; they are no longer

unrelated to what you are doing. Are there not some words in Macaulay's paragraph which you did not use, but which are better than those that you did use? The words "authenticated," "selection, rejection, and arrangement," "usurped," "elucidate"— these perhaps belong already to your knowledge-vocabulary. Is not this a good time to add them to your power-vocabulary? Note that fine trinity of words, "the court, the camp, and the senate." Most writers would have beat it out into something like "royal intrigues, military achievements, and political rivalries." Did you notice how fond Macaulay is of "not — but?" He has done more than any other writer to add clearness to explanation by the use of these two words.

Are your sentences as short and direct as his? Have you one sentence, as he has, that includes all the rest? Where did you place it in your paragraph? Macaulay placed his most important sentence first. This sentence is really a definition of "The perfect historian," the other sentences being illustrations of the definition. But Macaulay often places his most important sentence near the middle of the paragraph and sometimes at the end. Try these positions here. Begin with

"The perfect historian relates no fact, he attributes no expression to his characters which is not authenticated by sufficient testimony." Now place the omitted first sentence just before "He shows us the court, the camp, and the senate." Take it out now and place it last, so that instead of introducing the whole paragraph it will sum up the whole paragraph. There is, as you see, the widest liberty in placing your most important sentence. We are not looking for rules — there are no rules — we are looking for freedom, clearness, naturalness, and effectiveness. You may write an excellent paragraph that has no most important sentence. There is none in the first paragraph from Huxley on page 217. Or you may take two sentences instead of one to present the substance of your paragraph, as Macaulay does in his second paragraph.* But Macaulay usually has one most important sentence, and he usually places it first.

Do not let details, however, swallow up your main purpose. You are taking the phrase "The

*It is often only a question of punctuation. Most writers would have written "But" with a small letter and so have thrown the two sentences into one. Thus: "If a man, such as we are supposing, should write the history of England, he would assuredly not omit the battles, the sieges, the negotiations, the seditions, the ministerial changes; but with these he would intersperse the details which are the charm of historical romances."

perfect historian" and trying to express your thoughts about it so clearly that the reader or hearer will not only understand you but cannot misunderstand you. You are using Macaulay's paragraph not as a perfect paragraph but as a means of making your own paragraph more compact and effective. You took a paragraph for this purpose because a paragraph is a whole composition in miniature. You see also how important words and sentences are when studied as parts of a paragraph. It is not till we begin to fit sentences into paragraphs that we are in a position to judge of the fitness either of sentences or of words.

FROM ARNOLD*

"Faith in machinery is, I said, our besetting danger; often in machinery most absurdly disproportioned to the end which this machinery, if it is to do any good at all, is to serve; but always in machinery, as if it had a value in and for itself. What is freedom but machinery? What is population but machinery? What is coal but machinery? What are railroads but machinery? What is wealth

Culture and Anarchy, first chapter.

but machinery? What are, even, religious organizations but machinery? Now almost every voice in England is accustomed to speak of these things as if they were precious ends in themselves, and therefore had some of the characters of perfection indisputably joined to them. I have before noticed Mr. Roebuck's stock argument for proving the greatness and happiness of England as she is, and for stopping the mouths of all gainsayers. Mr. Roebuck is never weary of reiterating this argument of his, so I do not know why I should be weary of noticing it. 'May not every man in England say what he likes?' — Mr. Roebuck perpetually asks; and that, he thinks, is quite sufficient, and when every man may say what he likes our aspirations ought to be satisfied. But the aspirations of culture, which is the study of perfection, are not satisfied, unless what men say, when they may say what they like, is worth saying — has good in it, and more good than bad. In the same way the *Times*, replying to some foreign strictures on the dress, looks, and behavior of the English abroad, urges that the English ideal is that every one should

be free to do and to look just as he likes. But culture indefatigably tries, not to make what each raw person may like the rule by which he fashions himself; but to draw ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that.

"And in the same way with respect to railroads and coal. Every one must have observed the strange language current during the late discussions as to the possible failures of our supplies of coal. Our coal, thousands of people were saying, is the real basis of our national greatness; if our coal runs short, there is an end of the greatness of England. But what *is* greatness? — culture makes us ask. Greatness is a spiritual condition worthy to excite love, interest, and admiration; and the outward proof of possessing greatness is that we excite love, interest, and admiration. If England were swallowed up by the sea to-morrow, which of the two, a hundred years hence, would most excite the love, interest, and admiration of mankind — would most, therefore, show the evidences of having possessed greatness — the England of the last

twenty years, or the England of Elizabeth, of a time of splendid spiritual effort, but when our coal, and our industrial operations depending on coal, were very little developed? Well, then, what an unsound habit of mind it must be which makes us talk of things like coal or iron as constituting the greatness of England, and how salutary a friend is culture, bent on seeing things as they are, and thus dissipating delusions of this kind and fixing standards of perfection that are real!"

Arnold is on very familiar ground here. He is talking about culture, and no one of his generation thought so persistently about culture as he or succeeded in making his views prevail so widely. His manner is wholly different from Macaulay's. Arnold likes to define in few words the problem he is discussing, and then to repeat the definition so often that you cannot help remembering it. He has said time and again that "culture is the study of perfection" but finds a chance of repeating it in our first paragraph. When he defines greatness in our second paragraph as "a spiritual condition worthy to excite love, interest, and admiration," he repeats the words "love, interest, and admira-

tion" till you can hardly help associating greatness with "love, interest, and admiration." These two methods, definition and repetition, are powerful weapons, and Arnold is our best teacher in their use.

The subject of the first paragraph is "Culture *versus* machinery," of the second "Culture *versus* coal." The two paragraphs are well joined, the second being a continuation of the thought of the first; but they are not so compact as Macaulay's. Instead of filling his paragraph with short ringing statements, Arnold likes to ask questions and then answer them. You and he seem to be talking leisurely about the subject together. There is always in Arnold's pages this suggestion of leisurely well-bred conversation. It is very effective, but it is a looser method than Macaulay's. Macaulay is a hard downpour, Arnold a slow drizzle; but you will get just as soaked by the one as by the other. Each method brings out a new resource in the effective use of language. If you will carry the two seed-thoughts, "Culture *versus* machinery" and "Culture *versus* coal," around with you for a few days and then compare your two paragraphs with Arnold's, you will have added power and method to your use of English.

FROM HUXLEY*

"That man, I think, has had a liberal education who has been so trained in youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a mechanism, it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order; ready, like a steam engine, to be turned to any kind of work, and spin the gossamers as well as forge the anchors of the mind; whose mind is stored with a knowledge of the great and fundamental truths of Nature and of the laws of her operations; one who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience; who has learned to love all beauty, whether of Nature or of art, to hate all vileness, and to respect others as himself.

"Such an one and no other, I conceive, has had a liberal education; for he is, as completely as a man can be, in harmony with Nature. He will make the best of her, and

*A Liberal Education: and where to find it.

she of him. They will get on together rarely; she as his ever beneficent mother; he as her mouthpiece, her conscious self, her minister and interpreter."

"A liberally educated man" and "Why?"—these words indicate the topics of the two paragraphs. The first is a famous paragraph, famous for its breadth, clearness, force, and beauty. The second paragraph clinches the first by telling us that our liberally educated man is, after all, only "in harmony with Nature." That, says Huxley, is the supreme test. But the two paragraphs are perfect examples of clear thought and of effective method. Huxley is talking about a liberal education. Macaulay would have said: "A liberal education is an education which"— and, like a train of captives behind a triumphal car, there would have followed a brilliant series of "which" clauses telling us what a liberal education does. An admirable method for Macaulay and for all those who have learned to drive a long line of "which" clauses with a sure hand on the reins and a sure eye on the goal. Arnold would have defined a liberal education in a few carefully chosen abstract words like "conduct," "disinterestedness,"

"sweetness and light," "love, interest, and admiration," and would then have repeated the definition so adroitly that, whether you liked it or not, you would have to carry it with you. An admirable method for Arnold and for all those who have learned to make new pathways for thought out of abstract terms. Huxley defines a liberal education in terms of a liberally educated man. He says: "Let's not talk about an abstraction, something that we cannot see or touch or sympathize with. Let's talk about a man." Immediately you begin to test yourself and others by this liberally educated man. You take stock of your own "body," "intellect," "mind," "passions." You are thinking very intently about a liberal education, but you are looking not at a word ending in "ation" but at a human being.

Try this method now with other abstract subjects. Instead of attempting to explain to people your ideal of a practical education, give them your idea of the man who has had a practical education. Instead of talking about patriotism, illiteracy, honesty, statesmanship, efficiency, as shadows, talk about them first as folks. Your thought will flow more freely and will go into many more hidden corners of your subject. Then

go back to Huxley and see if there is not still more to learn. Are your divisions as clear-cut as his? Are your words as pictorial? "Mechanism," "logic engine," "steam engine," "gossamers," "anchors," "stunted ascetic," "trained to come to heel"— do not these words picture the thought better than the words you have used?

Sentences, then, like bananas, grow in bunches. These bunches are paragraphs. As the shape of each banana is partly determined by its place in the bunch, so the build of each sentence will depend upon what it has to do in the paragraph. And this is true of the paragraph that narrates as well as of the paragraph that explains. Each has a unity of its own, but each is part of a larger unity, the unity of the whole essay or of the whole story. To study any sort of paragraph we must catch it by its stem, its subject, and hold it up. As we look at it thus hanging down, we can judge of the fitness of its parts and learn how to make our own paragraphs hang well together.

A word now about the narrative paragraph as found in the short story. You are so familiar with Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* that it is needless to quote in full any paragraphs from it for narrative exercise. Let me give, however, the begin-

nings and topics of two paragraphs in this story, the one following the other: (1) "On awakening, he found himself on the green knoll from whence he had first seen the old man of the glen." (2) "He looked round for his gun, but in place of the clean, well-oiled fowling piece, he found an old firelock lying by him, the barrel incrusted with rust, the lock failing off, and the stock worm-eaten." The topics of the two paragraphs beginning with these sentences are (1) "What Rip first thought on awakening" and (2) "What Rip first did on awakening." Can you complete these two paragraphs without referring to the story? If not, read the story once more, then write out your own paragraphs and compare them with Irving's. Have you not left out something? This is a very important part of the story. If you do not grip the attention of the reader from the very moment that Rip wakes, you will not get it later on. Irving succeeds by putting himself in Rip's place and imagining what a poor fellow would think and then what he would do in his first efforts to right himself in such baffling surroundings. It is all very simple, but it is all very fine art. Every paragraph is pointing and moving now toward something decisive that will happen a little later

on. Rip is stumbling up a steeper mountain now than before, but at the top of it he will find complete recognition and happy restoration. Get the paragraph topics well in hand and with book closed see if you can lead Rip up and out as connectedly and as interestingly as Irving has done. If not, where did you omit something that ought to have been put in, and where did you put in something that does not fit? Perhaps you omitted nothing essential as far as the skeleton of the story is concerned, and yet you are aware that your story lacks charm and vividness. Congratulate yourself. To feel the incompleteness of your story in these finer details is an achievement that points pretty surely to larger triumphs yet to be.

In conclusion, then, take a few great essays and a few great stories and use them as guides, as companions, in finding and training the best that is in you of explanation and narration. Take a whole essay and a whole story. Pit yourself against the author, but do not confine yourself to a particular author. Aim at a habit — the habit of constructive reading, which means constructive thinking and constructive writing. Read, if possible, a whole essay or a whole story at a

sitting. Then turn to the paragraphs. Read them carefully, string them by their topics, take one or more of these topics with you in your work, think through them, put flesh on them, weigh them now in the scales of the originals, and try again. If a paragraph leads you into strange realms of thought, go with it cheerfully; it doubtless gave its author a rarer chase than it is giving you. Remember that the supreme teacher of literature and of language is literature itself. As soon as you part company with handbooks and establish a teacher-and-pupil relation with the masters themselves, you are drinking at the original source. You have exchanged the spigot for the fountain, and every page will mean power and mastery.

Literature can thus become an outlet not only to your unspoken thoughts and moods but to the choked passage-way of your own speech, through which your thoughts and moods have tried to pass; it can keep before you the vision of the ideal not only in the dreams of great idealists but in the shining structures in which their dreams have found sanctuary; it can give you a better knowledge of human nature not only as human nature is stored in human deeds but as it is stored in the

varied forms of language that express human deeds; it can restore the past to you not only as the past lives in the vanished centuries but as it is crystallized in the speech of those who gave character and direction to the vanished centuries; and it can show you the glory of the commonplace not only in the common things about you but in the commonest words through which the glory of the commonplace is flashed upon you.

THE END

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